

No. 2

Tuesday

Fourth Session

3rd February, 2009

Eighth Parliament

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

ADVANCE COPY

OFFICIAL REPORT

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE SECOND MEETING, FOURTH SESSION OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES CONSTITUTED AS SET OUT IN SCHEDULE 2 TO THE SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES ORDER, 1979.

SEVENTH SITTING

3rd February, 2009

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

The Honourable House of Assembly met at 10:15 a.m. in the Assembly Chamber, Court House, Kingstown.

PRAYERS

MR. SPEAKER IN THE CHAIR

Honourable Hendrick Alexander

Present

MEMBERS OF CABINET

Prime Minister, Minister of Finance,
Economic Planning, National Security,
Grenadines and Legal Affairs
Dr. the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves

Member for North Central Windward

Attorney General
Honourable Judith Jones-Morgan

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign
Affairs, Commerce and Trade
Honourable Louis Straker

Member for Central Leeward

Minister of National Mobilisation,
Social Development, Gender Affairs,
Non-Governmental Organisations,
Local Government, Persons with Disabilities,
Youths and Sports
Honourable Michael Browne

Member for West St. George

Minister of Education
Honourable Girlyn Miguel

Member for Marriacqua

Minister of Rural Transformation, Information,
Postal Service and Ecclesiastical Affairs
Honourable Selmon Walter

Member for Central South Windward

Minister of Health and the Environment
Dr. Douglas Slater

Member for South Leeward

Minister of Urban Development, Culture,
Labour and Electoral Matters
Rene Baptiste

Member for West Kingstown

Minister of Transport and Works
Honourable Clayton Burgin

Member for East St. George

Minister of Agriculture,
Forestry and Fisheries
Honourable Montgomery Daniel

Member for North Windward

Minister of Telecommunications, Science
Technology and Industry
Honourable Dr. Jerrol Thompson

Member for North Leeward

Minister of Housing, Informal Human,
Settlements, Physical Planning, Lands
and Survey and Local Government
Honourable Julian Francis

Government Senator

Minister of the State in the Prime Minister's
Office with Responsibility for the Public Service
Honourable Conrad Sayers

Member for Central Kingstown

Minister of Tourism
Honourable Glen Beache

Member for South Windward

Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture,
Forestry and Fisheries, Parliamentary Secretary
Honourable Saboto Caesar

Government Senator

Honourable Rochelle Forde

Government Senator/ Deputy Speaker

Honourable Richard Williams

Government Senator

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE

Honourable Arnhim Eustace

Leader of the Opposition
Member for East Kingstown

Dr. the Honourable Godwin Friday

Member for Northern Grenadines

Honourable Major St. Claire Leacock

Opposition Senator

Honourable Daniel Cummings

Opposition Senator

ABSENT

Honourable Terrence Ollivierre

Member for Southern Grenadines

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

TUESDAY 3RD FEBRUARY, 2009

PRAYERS

The Honourable Speaker, Hendrick Alexander read the Prayers of the House.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Prime Minister.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I would wish if this Honourable House finds it convenient so to do, to facilitate me in a shifting just slightly, of the amendment. I have indicated to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition why I wish to do this. At 11 o'clock this morning Mr. Speaker, I have a teleconference with other members of the Monetary Council of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and the Governor of the Central Bank which should last one hour from 11 o'clock until 12 o'clock. I will wish to be out of here maybe 5, 7 minutes to 11 o'clock so, as not to have disruptions of this House Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask whether questions which are on the Order Paper for me to answer, whether they can be asked now and I can answer them before I go and then the regular order of the meeting will then take place with Obituaries and Congratulations. And Mr. Speaker, I have two statements which I will wish to make upon my own return, one on the issue of CLICO and one relating to measures taken by the Government additional to those which we have in the Budget concerning the fall out from the International Economic Crisis. In that way we can save quite a bit of time. So, I do not know whether I need to put it in a Motion, Mr. Speaker, or you would simply accept it.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Not necessarily so, considering the circumstances I have no difficulty in acceding to your request and therefore we make that slight shift in the Order and allow you to answer the questions in your name and then we will go back to the regular Order Paper as listed that is Obituaries, Congratulatory Remarks, Confirm the Minutes and then so on and then we go back to the questions. I have no difficulty with that and I think you have discussed it with as you said with the Leader of the Opposition and I think that..., I am sure he has no problem with that idea: okay; yes Honourable...

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: I think he should confirm the Minutes.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Okay, fair enough, I agree with you, I agree with you on that so we start with the Minutes, yes, confirm the Minutes.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

DR THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members I beg to move that the Minutes of this Honourable House of the meetings held 26th November, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th December 2008 be confirmed seriatim.

The Minutes of the sitting held on 26th November, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th December 2008, copies of which had been previously circulated were taken as read and confirmed as amended.

QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWERS

1. *The Honourable Arnhim Eustace (Leader of the Opposition), asked the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Economic Planning, National Security, Legal and Grenadines Affairs:*

a. *How many motor vehicles are presently owned by the Central Government, and*

b. *of these, how many are cars and SUV's?*

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Prime Minister.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the total number of vehicles owned by the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines that is to say, the Central Government not the Statutory Enterprises or Public Enterprises, amount to 253, sorry Mr. Speaker, 187. The number of cars 2, the number of SUV's 51, number of Trucks 17, Pick-ups 47, Vans 28, Buses 11, Jeeps 12, Tractors 2, Motor cycles 13, Ambulance 15, I would say Mr. Speaker, it took every single accounting officer complained about the irritation of having to check these, because apparently they had not been checked..., there is an inventory, but they did not..., in fact I asked them to give me a comparison between 2001 because I know for instance those..., but they did not even have that. So that you take for instance, police and fire has 66, sorry, it is 187 excluding police and fire. So, it is 253; I now understand the answer which they have given me. Police and fire have 66 and so it is 253.

For instance, in the case of the police they did not have as many vehicles when we got into office, and those which they had were in an awful condition. I know the issue often arises why so many SUVs', well, as you will see there are 51 out of 253: they are actually for a number of purposes, they have more space and even though they will burn some more fuel, in fact, you have less maintenance on them so that the values in a sense they squared out and given some of the roads they have to go on, particularly in the case of the police, but I just want to say that I do not think that the Leader of the Opposition was a very popular man for about a week or so [laughter] in the Public Service. I heard a number of stewpsing of teeth: *what kind of question is this? I mean I get work to do; I have to find out how many vehicles.* I said, well, the Leader of the Opposition has asked, find the answer for me [laughter].

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: I just want to confirm that you said there were only two cars.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Yes, that is what they have here on the list.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: It does not sound right to me.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: They may not have classified those as cars, I do not know, but this is what they gave me.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Okay.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Clearly they have more than two cars.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: If the Inventories are kept up, there would be no difficulty in getting the figures.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Yes, well you know...

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: So, you can say that to the Civil Service.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: I would say this, once I asked in the House a question for oral answer to provide me with a list of Agreements and Treaties to which the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a party or has succeeded to since independence from those hitherto. The then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Allen begged me please, give me about six months nah to answer, but he thanked me because they finally had a list and in fact, the list was not a complete one either, it was not a correct list, because I was able to tell him about some which were not on his list, but that is the story.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: All right your question will be question No. 4, I think. Question No. 4 will be the next question to you Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Member for the Northern Grenadines.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask question No. 4 standing in my name of the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

4. The Honourable Godwin Friday (Northern Grenadines), asked the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Economic Planning, National Security, Legal and Grenadines Affairs:

a. What is the status of the Government's review of the basis on which property tax is assessed; and

b. Will the basis on which property tax is assessed be changed and, if so, in general terms how will the change affect the amount of money property owners will pay in property taxes.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, before I answer this particular question, I just want to say, this administration has been addressing a series of reform measures. Reforms which several governments have sought to avoid, to duck not to embrace, but reforms which are necessary to modernise our state administration, to make it more efficient and to enable it to respond more efficaciously to the challenges

which come upon us from outside and from inside. For example, we have done the Reclassification of the Public Service, we have done significant reforms on Income Tax, we have done the VAT so that we can put ourselves in line to come to terms with trade liberalization, for instance, those who do not have the VAT, the EPA (the Economic Partnership Agreement) with Europe it creates a difficulty and here we are now with the Property Tax Reform.

Some of these measures have not been popular in some circles, and it is easy to play demagogue with some of them, but this Government is determined to streamline the State administration, make it more efficient and to put it in the situation to respond better to the external and internal challenges and accordingly to improve the condition of life of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. So, I say that by way of a prefatory statement.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines engaged a consultant firm, Browne and Company to undertake a pilot project in 2003 to look at the methodology and valuation implications of a change in the basis of property taxation from an assessment based on an annual rental value (ARV), 5% of the ARV is currently charged to a taxation system based on a market value assessment. That pilot project was carried out in 2003, 2004 and included consultations with the public and stakeholders in eight areas. A review of the Legislation recommendations for changes to the Legislation, appropriate valuation methodology to be adopted and revaluation survey procedures for all part of the pilot project.

In addition, sample market valuations were carried out to compare with the annual rental value the ARV assessments to inform the tax rates that will need to be applied to market values, obviously at a much lower rate, to achieve approximately the same level of tax burden on a per property basis using market values as opposed to annual rental values.

The pilot also revealed that as much as 30% of the built property may be missing from the existing tax roll as additions have not always been identified and added to the roll. The last evaluation being carried out and assessed in the early 1990s' and therefore, a significant improvement in tax collection could be achieved by ensuring that 100% of properties had captured from a new revaluation whilst leaving the tax burden per property approximately the same from a move to a market value based assessment. It is intended that this would be revenue neutral, but what we will do, we will capture more properties as we proceed with this modernised system.

The changes to legislations which were recommended then are now that a new revaluation is underway, under considerations by the Attorney General's Office, a National Revaluation Survey is now on the way which commenced in September 2008, and is likely to be largely completed by the end of 2009. That valuation activity aims to identify all built property so that missing properties may be added to the tax roll and undertaken assessment of market value in order that in time a new market value based tax roll can be produced that is equitable and complete as all the properties will be identified and assessed.

The National Revaluation Project is added considerably by a new aerial photography data that the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines commissioned in 2007 and is now available to provide new digital map data which identifies all built property as at 2007. So, Mr. Speaker, we have to get everybody into the net. It is not fair that some people, including poor people paying property taxes and some other persons are not paying.

The project staff had been trained in the use of Global Positioning System, (the GPS) and the Geographical Information System (GIS) the technology and valuation techniques, details of recent property sales have been analysed and expected to arrive at a data set of comparables, relevant market sales have been analysed and broken down to component values of property and land in the EC dollar per square foot. This has reduced the element of subjectivity to a minimum and allows the field team to apply factual sales evidence of market sales to the subject property as a guide to inform open market values application in our country in 2008. The project field teams will be visiting every property in our country during the course of the next 12 months. The project relies heavily on the use of the GPS Technology to record all the data captured electronically within a special data base GIS tied to this specific property location.

The basis on which the property tax is assessed that is the annual rental value method is intended to change to a market value assessment in order to deliver greater equity across the spectrum of property and property owners that exist in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. It is not intended that the amount of money that the property owners will pay in property taxes will increase, provided of course that the property is currently on the tax roll. If your property is not currently on the tax roll, obviously you will then be paying for the first time and you would say, that your tax is gone up so that ... we will have the assessment done under the existing annual rental value assessment basis. However, those owners who are not on the existing property tax roll or who have substantially enlarged or improved their property since the last revaluation took place in the early 1990's can expect an assessment relating to the enlargement of their property. The overall objective is to produce an assessment based on market value which is free and equitable in that it will cover all built property in our country and as I have said before, about 30% of the built properties are not currently on the tax roll and that is basically what it is about.

I should point out that the previous administration had in fact repeatedly announced in its measures including the last two or three Budget Speeches of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition when he was Minister of Finance to move to a similar system and we have the professionals engaged in that regard.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Clarification Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Clarification, or Supplementary, you want the clarification or just to clarify something?

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Yes. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said that the burden or the measures are intended to be revenue neutral and that the burden are on each individual, property owner is intended to pretty much be the same, yet on the other hand it is intended to bring in another 30% of the houses that are not currently on the tax roll which would suggest that that would increase the revenue that is included. So, I need a clarification if that means that it will increase the revenue collected by the Government by bringing in a 30% who are not on the roll or if by bringing in the 30% then we can lower taxes for all property owners.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: What happens is this, it is revenue neutral in the sense and I have made a point that those who are not currently on the tax roll who should be paying and not paying will then have to pay. Now it doesn't mean that those who now have to pay, it would not be revenue neutral in relation to them, all it means is that those who had been delinquent would be brought on to the roll. Now, in

terms of the final determination of the rates, these are matters which are not yet in terms of the market assessment, because obviously, there would be less than what the annual rental is in terms of the percentage. But those are things to be determined, but the policy is intended to be revenue neutral. In relation, you are paying your taxes currently for the same size house in the same location, it is intended to be revenue neutral in relation to that property.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: You mean the burden is the same.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Yes.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: The revenue would increase from bringing everybody else onto the tax roll.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Sure, but that does not mean it is not revenue neutral. It means there will be an increase of revenue because there are currently delinquent persons. For instance, if we bring on all persons who do not pay their driver's licenses and we did not increase, it is a measure or if you use some other measures of assessment, once you bring those who are not paying on, there would be an increase in revenue.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Question No. 5, Honourable Member for the Northern Grenadines.

DR THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask question No.5 standing in my name of the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

5. *The Honourable Godwin Friday (Northern Grenadines), asked the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Economic Planning, National Security, Legal and Grenadines Affairs:*

The jetty at Paget Farm near to the Fisheries Complex and the jetty at Hamilton Bequia, near to the Catholic Church road were badly damaged by a storm late last year and have not been repaired.

a. *Why have these two important facilities not been repaired; and*

b. *when will these jetties be repaired?*

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, hurricane Omar struck with storm surges during the month of October, 2008, specifically around October 16th. There was an estimated damage done by Omar of nearly \$6 million. Among the items of damage were the facilities of a number of jetties some of which were out of commission at the time when Omar struck, but the two which are addressed here, the one at Hamilton and the one at Paget Farm: Paget Farm Jetty, Mr. Speaker, while this jetty suffered extensive damage during tropical storm Omar and repairing it might be the correct thing to do. A number of questions will have to be asked including whether we do the repairs now in the way in which it ought to be done, or whether we ought to await the construction of a jetty which should have started already as part and parcel of the Isle De Quarte Project, it would be recalled that part of the commitments in relation to that

project involved the construction of a jetty in a very short period of time at Paget Farm. For one reason or another, the project has been held up though the project is still on stream.

The other issue which we have to look at and the Honourable Member for the Northern Grenadines, will know this, is that whether there are not some other things which we can do in relation to the fisher folk in the area, such as reclaiming the foreshore in order to create more adequate boat ramps for the fisher folk. So, these are some practical questions, because I myself, I have been there and I have seen the issues and therefore, it cannot be looked at just simply in isolation. I can come and tell you, yes, we are going to fix it and so on, it is true that we have people who have gone down. In fact, I think today my Permanent Secretary and people from the Ministry of Works and from the Grenadines Administration are down in Paget Farm. This is a second visit prior to in fact, this question, no a third visit prior to this question.

Now, I think the Honourable Member who is a layman like me, I think if he goes there and looks at it, he will see that there were major construction flaws in the design of that jetty. It was not designed and built by us, by this administration; it was done under the previous administration. In the first case the designers really did not take into account the rise in sea levels, so the supporting beams for the jetty were cast on to piles directly at sea level and you notice that that is a problem. They did not contemplate the rage of the seas. Somebody must have gone there when it was very calm and did not talk to the fisher folk and the people in the area and did a design which was inappropriate to the circumstances.

Secondly, in addition to the problem with the design, the rest of the structure was constructed in a prefabricated style. Although these precast slabs are relatively heavy and locked into each other, they present their own destructive mechanism, in that you would notice that the vent holes left in the surface are just one and half inches in diameter. So, when the waves roll into the shore, they create a massive air pocket under the slabs, this trapped air acts as a hydraulic lift which continually moves the jetty surface during storm surges. It was the slamming of the concrete surface against the beams and the piles which caused the jetty to self destruct. Now, I am not blaming the political directorate you know, because the people who decided during the NDP to build this is not..., they are not engineers. Engineers are hired for these things, the political directorates are rebuilding a jetty, they say, yes we will build it and people do the design and they built it, but it turned out that it really was not properly done. But it is not only the design, not only the self destructive construction, beside the self destructive feature of the jetty, I must also point out that the jetty was constructed in an area that traditionally was known for huge waves. They built it in the area where the waves are greater. I think the Honourable Member for the Northern Grenadines would accept that as seen during hurricanes Lenny, Ivan and now Omar.

The Jetty was simply designed as a finger pier with two lower areas attached like wings to accommodate passengers from small craft, designed more like impediments than lasting structures. The first storm simply deposited them on the seabed, the very first storm. The design did not take into consideration the wave action of the immediate location and the shallowness of the area. Only shallow draft craft have used the Jetty as it is shallow and there are still obstacles on the seabed. The Jetty was never used for any commercial purposes or on a regular basis, except as a drop off point for fishermen. It was used primarily as mending and drying areas for the nets of the seine fishermen prior to Omar. So it was really a place to dry the seine rather than for boat to

pull up. The Jetty suffered its first major damage during hurricane Ivan in 2004 and got progressively worse since. A section is now missing from the central portion which leaves it in two portions.

Now, to make this jetty truly functional the following is necessary, changing in the design must be done, the length increase to reach deeper water, swing the end to create an L-shape and erect a break water to the East as an extension of the existing fishermen's boat ramp, to create an area of still water so that the boats will not be smashed against the jetty as currently happens. Like something what we have done up in Owia which is a major project. Dredged the existing area to remove rocks from the seabed and remove the broken slabs and beams from the existing surface and those which collapsed unto the seabed and use them as part of the ongoing foreshore reclamation and extend the same to create a second boat ramp for fishermen.

Now, we have to really talk to the developers while we are doing our independent study and we must remember though it has been substantially damaged in 2004, it really went to pieces essentially with Omar and it happened in October and we have to hold the discussions with the people in addition to our independent work with the developers for Isle De Quarte to see whether they are going to do something, where they are going to do it and how we can rationalise that.

So, what I can say to the Honourable Member, it is a work in progress and I am very concerned about it and I want to see something done, but the question is whether we cannot do something with better alternatives and it is something which we have to talk to the fisher folk about down there.

Now, in relation to the Hamilton Jetty, this was damaged extensively by the tropical storm Omar, I am talking about the Government's jetty not on the private one, because I assumed it is the Government's jetty at Hamilton that you are talking about, not the one for Mrs. Hughes [interjection] yes, the one for the Government, yes.

Most of the wooden planking for the deck was removed by the waves and this was the case of most with the wooden jetties on the island. This jetty is also in relatively shallow water and is used primarily by water taxi operators from the area as well as yachtsmen accessing the central portion of Hamilton and as an easy access for those wishing to attend the Roman Catholic Church. The Jetty was hardly ever use for any commercial purpose, but obviously it has an important social function. It is currently unsightly and we have to repair it, this one would not take a great cost and that is also being looked at and I will expect that that will be done fairly speedily. So, the Hamilton one is a horse of a different colour than the one down at Paget Farm and I am sure you would agree with me in the analysis which I have given and the way in which we should proceed.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Question No. 7, Honourable Member for Northern Grenadines you will ask for the Member of the Southern Grenadines.

DR THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask in the name of the Honourable Terrance Ollivierre, Member for the Southern Grenadines of the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance a similar question to the one I asked before.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Yes Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker I rise to ask in the name of the Honourable Terrance Ollivierre, Member for the Southern Grenadines of the Honourable Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance a similar question to the one I asked before.

7. *The Honourable Terrance Ollivierre (Southern Grenadines), asked the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Economic Planning, National Security, Legal and Grenadines Affairs:*

The wharf at Canouan has over the years been gradually deteriorating and is now at a stage where it is difficult to use and is unsafe for use by ferry operators, local residents and the general public:

Can the Honourable Minister please state when we will have a solution to this continued wharf deterioration.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I can give him a very long answer, but I will give him a shortened version. The Canouan Jetty is scheduled to be refurbished at an estimated cost submitted by CCA Limited of \$193,121.16 the project is to commence at the beginning of March 2009 and should take approximately three months. They are actually ordering, the main item in the cost would be the steel works to install the steel beams which is US\$52,171.47 that is the most expensive part of it. And CCA has a good track record in doing these things down in Canouan.

A study on the structural integrity of the jetty conducted on the 15th November by the Port Authority Engineering Staff indicated that nearly 20% of the jetty is structurally unsound. This is why we have to do a substantial restructuring rather than just cosmetic work. The Government's Chief Engineer whom we had sent that study to has supported the findings of the in-house engineers in the Port Authority.

The scope of the work for this project is as follows: demolition of an 800 square foot deck slab at the end of the jetty which represents approximately 32 feet in length, removal of damaged reinforce concrete pile, replacement of concrete piles and rebuilding of the beams and deck slab, improvement to the lighting system, this aspect of refurbishing of the jetty is electrical and would therefore be treated as a separate project, but we want to put the lights on it too for when people going in at nights, but I am answering you now only the question of the structure. The tenders are currently being sought in respect of the lighting.

I want to emphasise that during the process of reconstruction, the jetty would remain open to ferry traffic and it would be reconstructed in a manner which would facilitate the ferry traffic whilst the reconstruction is going on.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: That is it? Okay. The final question to you Honourable Prime Minister in this case would be Question No. 10 by the Honourable Senator Leacock.

HONOURABLE MAJOR ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker I rise to ask question No. 10 standing in my name of the Honourable Prime Minister.

10. *Honourable St. Clair Leacock (Opposition Senator), asked the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Economic Planning, National Security, Legal and Grenadines Affairs:*

When we name institutions and or other national assets in the name of outstanding Vincentians, we have an obligation to maintain those symbols in the most respectful of ways. In this regard the state of affairs of the Coast Guard Vessel, the Captain Mulzac, like the discarded George Mc Intosh cries out for attention. Could the Honourable Prime Minister please indicate whether:

- a. It is still the intention to restore the vessel Captain Mulzac to sea worthy stage?*
- b. Is there a value to keep the vessel solely for training purposes?*
- c. What is the current cost for its upkeep in its present condition; and*
- d. are there medium term plans to replace the vessel with one of similar utility?*

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, while I understand the concern of the Honourable Senator in respect of places and properties and vessels named after distinguished nationals, like *Captain Mulzac* and *George McIntosh*, I think my Honourable friend would agree with me that this Government has an excellent track record on the issue of historical and cultural reclamation [applause]. I do not have to go through all the details at this point, because I do not want the preamble to the question to make it appear as though it is a critique and I just wanted to meet that critique head on to show that it is not one with substance.

Mr. Speaker, judging from the result of a survey and I am going to answer the questions, and they are going to flow from one into the next, the various parts by the naval architect Mr. Courtney Lange from Tsunami Marine Limited from Trinidad and Tobago on May 22nd, 2008 is really not feasible to restore the *Captain Mulzac*. Most of the internal systems are either nonfunctional or outdated. The main fire fighting system for the engine room had to be activated because of the deteriorating condition of the cylinders containing the fire fighting agent Halon.

Hollan is also no longer in use in the extinguishers because of its harmful effects to the environment. In fact, I believe that we have a legal provision which prohibits its use. There are lots of modern navigational equipment mandated by the International Maritime Organisation based in London, that is not part of the present navigational outfit of the *Captain Mulzac*. The costs to restore will add up to the cost of a modern equip vessel of its size, this is part of the conclusion of the survey.

Mr. Longe stated that quote:

“Based on the defects and anomalies observed and identified within this report, the vessel at the time of the survey was assessed as not fit for the purpose of its intended operations as envisioned by the St. Vincent Coast Guard. Therefore, it is strongly recommended as a strategic plan for the enhancement of the St. Vincent Coast Guard capabilities that a new patrol vessel designed and build for intended operations by the SVG Coast Guard be considered”.

The vessel is not in proper condition for training purposes. For example, the onboard safety systems are not in proper condition to facilitate training, the fire fighting system is down, the bilge pumps are not functioning and the present machinery main engines are not up to safe functional capacity. This is really a very old vessel. Although three of the four engines are starting, they will still have problems that will deem them unsafe for operations, for example, overheating, poor alignment and so forth. It is like a old jalopy, you are going up a hill with a radiator and every minute you have to stop to put some water in it and so on and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, in 2006 the Damen Shipyard in Holland provided for dry docking and upgrade to a sum of approximately €600,000 and that was not to do it completely. With the Government development plans for Maritime Security amongst other things, modern training for Coast Guard Personnel and in order to have an efficient Coast Guard Service, a more modern vessel is being discussed.

Mr. Speaker, we have had a presentation from Damen on it, last year, it will surprise Honourable Members to know it would cost US\$16 million to buy a Coast Guard Vessel of the type which we will need currently and we are considering it, because of the inter-linkage of a similar type of vessel in Jamaica or in Trinidad and in Barbados. Mr. Speaker, as is well known, the first Coast Guard Vessel purchased since 1979 was purchased by this administration, the H. K Tannis and when we purchased it, I remember listening to Nice Radio and the spokes persons for the Opposition was saying, what kind of vessel for \$2.3 million? There were questions about it. That little piece of vessel, they do not know the capacity of the vessel, the equipment and everything and it was really a slur on Commander Robin who personally had gone to several ports in the US with the assistance of the US Coast Guard to purchase an excellent second hand vessel. We have purchased several ribs and we have also purchased other smaller patrol boats, both with the Coast Guard and with the Customs.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to make the point that we have been involved with discussions with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is getting substantial new assets this year and next year which would involve them also patrolling up the waters as we work closer in the coordination of our security. So, we have to put in, in it and we are having additional supports particularly in case to Trinidad.

Mr. Speaker, in so far as maritime security goes, I just want to add one other thing. Currently, there are two radar sites which are being constructed. We want to do a third one in the Grenadines, but we are doing one on the Windward side of the island, one on the Leeward side of the island, so that we can have the information fed into a central computer as vessels are coming in. So, we are doing several things in this regard to bring our maritime security within the context of our resources and our relationships with the other members of the OECS and particularly Trinidad and Tobago, which is outside of the RSS to strengthen our maritime security. Our maritime security is also strengthened by the RSS Air Winged the two C26 aircraft. I am obliged.

SUPPLEMENTARY

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Mr. Speaker, from the answer given by the Prime Minister it is clear that the supplementary follows that the *Mulzac* is nothing but a piece of antique and I therefore ask, what is delaying the Government in disposing of the asset as it stands?

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, the final report came late May last year and there were discussions as to what we should do and we also had to get quotations to see whether it would worth the while. I just want to say to the Honourable Senator that it is the matter we seek to dispose of assets in circumstances where it is necessary and desirable so to do, but we have to do so in a very prudent way.

Without wanting to put cold water on my Honourable friend enthusiastic questioning in this regard, I just want to say this Mr. Speaker, I have signed on to Boards of Survey to old typewriters and old pieces of equipment which have been in storerooms for donkey prior to my arrival in office. I do not say that..., we are dealing with this matter seriously, but I just want to make that point for what it is worth. I am obliged.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Okay that brings us to the end of this period of question time. We will go back to our regular..., the Order Paper as is in its regular way.

OBITUARIES

HONOURABLE MR SPEAKER: Obituaries, Honourable Member for Marriaqua, Minister for education.

HONOURABLE GIRLYN MIGUEL: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I stand before you this morning representing the teaching fraternity here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines to pay tribute to an outstanding Vincentian an excellent public servant, one who devoted his entire life to educating the nation's children and teachers, one who now leaves behind indelible footprints in the sands of the education landscape in our blessed land.

Charles Duncan Hercules began his service as an educator here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the early 1930s' during which period he served as an unqualified teacher in several primary schools. Our records indicated that he successfully completed the School Management Examination in October of 1934 and the Junior College of Preceptors Examination in December of that very year. He was awarded a Teacher's Third Class Certificate in January 1935 and was appointed as a Certificated Probationary Teacher at the then Belair Anglican School on September 9, 1935 where he served until his appointment on promotion on February 28, 1937 as a Certificated Assistant Teacher. From 1938 –1943 he served at the Brighton Methodist School as a Certificated Assistant Teacher. He took up duties at the Kingstown Anglican School on January 1, 1944 and served there until he was appointed on promotion as Head Teacher of the Stubbs Government School on January 1, 1948. Upon completion of a programme of studies in Agricultural Education in the USA in 1961, he accepted the post of Organizer for Rural Science in the primary schools in the Ministry of Education January 1, 1962. Approval was given for his acting appointment as Inspector of Schools, all be it brief, May 1, 1965 and also in September 19, 1966 on both occasions during the period of vacation leave of Mr. E. B. John. He headed to the University of the West Indies in October 1965 to read for the Certificate in Education. He was appointed to a post of Inspector of schools, a post which was subsequently renamed, 'Education Officer' from March 29, 1967. He was appointed to the post of Chief Education Officer in an acting capacity July 1, 1969 until September 29, 1969.

Mr. Hercules attained the age of 55 years in August 1970, but was retained to act as Chief Education Officer August 1, 1970 and until August 31, 1971. He officially retired from the Public Service on May 24, 1972 but subsequently gave service as a teacher at the then Emmanuel High School, Kingstown from November 7, 1973.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, our nation has been blessed with an educator who remained committed to the overall development of all students, teachers and administrators throughout his life. One who was never afraid to confront controversial issues as was evidence by his involvement in the Teachers Union. A period which he met conflict head on, because he was persuaded that problems needed to be solved. Nevertheless, throughout his entire service to this nation, his activities were dotted by evident professionalism. May his soul rest in peace, I am obliged Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I rise to pay tribute to Charles Hercules and Arthur Connell, a lady: a centurion of Murray Village, Mother Smith and to Peter Dennie.

Mr. Speaker, Charles Hercules was my Head Master at Richmond Hill Government School many years ago. He was to me, for me at least a fine example of what a teacher should be. I took my, what you call exams for Secondary School under his tutelage and I must admit that he played a very great role in my advancement in that regard. I got a lot of licks from him because he was very concerned about Spelling, Dictation and Essays and the language we use and the tenses and the dictions and had a special strap which was carved out of leather with a leather handle. He always hits you in the palm of your hand, but most of the time he missed the palm and hit you higher up and I remember so much about that that as I attended his funeral that thought crossed my mind several times, but he was a good teacher. He had the interest of his pupils at heart and he never failed to show it even when he was using that correction rod that he had. Over the years, I had been in contact with him, he does not live very far from me, I could have walked to his home and he was an institution in the Ratho Mill area. Everybody knew Hercules.

He also was a Methodist Local Preacher for nearly 70 years as indicated by the records produced at his funeral. So, apart from his fine work as a teacher, he dedicated himself very greatly with the spiritual side of things and I do not believe we will find somebody who will break his record of nearly 70 years as a Local Preacher. At that funeral which was very well attended I must say and I expected it would have been, it is the first time that I was seeing an auto obituary, I have never even had the comment before, he wrote an obituary which he wanted to be read at his funeral and he gave the tasks to F. I. Jack, former Headmaster of the Grammar School to read that auto obituary. So, apart from the general Eulogy and tributes, he decided and he told Reverend Job that few days before he died that he was writing his own obituary.

He was a very discipline man and his contribution to St. Vincent and the Grenadines has been a very great one, both in terms of his role as a spiritual leader and also in terms of the education of many children here in this country, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. May God rest his soul.

Mother Smith of Murray Village was 102 years old and like the Honourable Representative for East St. George, I will like to recognise those persons in my constituency who achieved those milestones. The last one was Mr.

Anderson. Mother Smith was a very lively lady even at the age of 100. I remember just about two years ago, three years ago, she attended at our headquarters one of the events which I have annually, that is, the Senior Citizens Day and actively got up to dance at 100, she needed a bit of support, but she got up and she had that kind of spirit which you do not often find at that age and she passed away a few days ago. And I am sure that many people particularly in the Murray Village area, her children Christine and the others will miss her greatly, because she herself has made her contribution in many ways to the community in which she lived most of her life, and I think she will be buried tomorrow. I want to say to the family that we extend our deepest condolences to them and many of us will be able to attend her funeral God's willing.

Arthur Connell passed away and I regret to say that I did not know. It was only about an hour before his funeral I was informed of his death and I deeply regret not being able to attend his funeral. This is a man, a businessman in this community who had a very deep social consciousness, very concerned about the development of his country St. Vincent and the Grenadines. He loved this country, he loved the people of this country and even with his business pursuits his activities, the Chamber of Commerce and bodies of that type attest to his concern and his love for his country. He was not afraid at any time to express his views and he was a very independent thinker, especially in matters related to the development of our society. He has now passed on and I want to say to his relatives, his wife that we feel their loss, but the decision of his passing was not ours, that is in the hands of a much higher power.

And finally Mr. Speaker, I want to pay tribute to Peter Dennie, a young, vibrant announcer on Nice Radio, a person with a personality which was very engaging and from the tributes that have been pouring into the station and elsewhere, it is clear that he would be sadly missed. He was a strong supporter of the New Democratic Party and he assisted us greatly particularly in matters relating to the Youth Arm of our Party.

I went to his wedding just sometime in August last year and the way he conducted himself at that wedding is typical of his spirit, one of happiness, wanting to make other people happy by his engaging personality. When he arrived at the door of the church for the wedding ceremony, he had on white suit, a white tie, a white shirt, a white hat; red shades and a walking stick, a cane and all his groomsmen were dressed in the same outfit and he stood at the door and he posed with his cane, that is Peter. Everybody of course started to laugh as he walked down the aisle and it is typical of his spirit, his openness, even when he was taking his vows he managed to inject humor when his father who was the presiding Minister, Pastor Dennie was in fact guiding him in relation to his vows.

The nature of his death, the suddenness of his death have left a lot of people in this country very sad and I was informed, I think it was this morning that his wife who was also injured had an operation in Grenada last night, it lasted about 6½ hours to repair the damage to her head and I hope that she will pull through. They said she did very well and we expect that she will pull through. But the nature of his death, the tragedy surrounding his death is something that gives us all cause for concern. He will be buried on Thursday at what we all know long time a Shankweiler Church that is around the Park, Kingstown Evangelical, yes, that is the proper name and he will be buried there on Thursday. I expect that there will be a large turnout.

I want to say to his family, to his father, his mother and his uncle, well his wife will not be there, I want to say to her too that we mourn his loss deeply. He was a young man of great promise and his untimely death at the age of twenty-seven, twenty-eight is something that really gives you sorrow. May God have mercy on his soul.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: I acknowledge the Minister of Works. I think he was on his feet. You give way totally? [Laughter] Honourable Minister of Tourism, Honourable Member for West Kingstown.

HONOURABLE RENE BAPTISTE: Urban Development...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: And Urban Development and so on.

HONOURABLE RENE BAPTISTE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to pay tribute at this time to four Vincentians: Mr. Dollis Forbes, who died in the United States on the 19th December and was buried on the 3rd January. Mr. Dolce Forbes was the former Solicitor's Clerk to the former Right Honourable Milton Cato, for many, many years; at the offices upstairs of Reliance Printery; that is where I first met him. I subsequently came into contact with him after he left and went to the United States, when St Vincent and the Grenadines gained Independence in 1979. I had the good fortune for him to pick me up at my aunt's house in Brooklyn and drive to the United Nations and stand on the parapet when the flag of the newly independent nation of St Vincent and the Grenadines was raised at the United Nations.

We subsequently met again in the Mechanics Lodge, where he served with distinction, for Mr. Dolce Forbes was a foundation member of the fifty seven years old Independent Order of Preston Unity Mechanics. He was a pioneer having served in that organisation in every single office; and at the time of his death was a High Priest of the Mechanics. To his brother Mr. Kenneth Ash of Lowman's Hill, his sons, children, grandchildren and great grand our deepest sympathy and we are sure with such a large family, a great network of support continues to be there for those who mourn his loss. May he rest in peace.

The second person I wish to remember at this time and place in the record of this Honourable House on his passing is a gentleman known as the 'Mighty Duke'. His name is Kelvin Pope and records indicate that the 'Mighty Duke' was born in St Vincent in 1932, with roots in Park Hill. The Mighty Duke and family went to Trinidad in the '30s' and they settled in Pointe Fortin. From there he began his calypso career and was known as the most fashionable and best dressed calypsonian of his time. He had a performance here I think it was either in 2007 or 2008 at Aquatic Club, his final performance.

But he scored in the Calypso arena very highly because he was the only person to ever win in Trinidad and Tobago, the Calypso Monarch Title, four consecutive times; from 1968 - 1971. He even did better than Sparrow; but I think for the younger persons in St Vincent and the Grenadines who may not know about Duke would remember this song: '*How Many More Must Die*'. When apartheid was raging in South Africa and the Calypsonians from Trinidad and Tobago throughout the Eastern Caribbean lent their voices in popular protest: '*How Many More Must Die*'.

His career spans some five decades and he last took to the stage in competition ... among the songs was the Road March of 1987, '*Thunder*', which was produced by Vincentian Granville Straker and arranged by maestro

Frankie Mc Intosh, our condolences, and those of the Carnival Fraternity; including Board and Members of the CDC; to Kelvin Pope's relatives and friends.

Also passed away is a young Electrician that worked with the CDC and Dynamic Guys, who was electrocuted in very sad circumstances; Dennis Samuels to his relatives and friends, our condolences as well.

Finally, I also wish to place on record and join the Honourable Leader of the Opposition in paying tribute to Arthur Connell who passed away on the 26th January and was buried on the 29th. Arthur Connell I remember my mother referring to his father as one of the old time Public Servants that use to go from island to island, particularly the Windward Islands. Like Mr. Henry Williams of blessed memory and George Thomas of blessed memory. They worked in the Civil Service it was called; in the Colonial Civil Service. So, Arthur Connell was born in St Lucia but came to St Vincent , I do not think he knows much about St Lucia as a place of living other than going there for business.

My encounter with Mr. Arthur Connell was in the 1960s as someone who read the lesson in church. Also, when down here was Hadley Brothers where Bonadies Supermarket is now and he used to be selling the paints; that is the Paint Section. Then later on they moved up to Middle Street: Connell's Limited, when he opened up his own business and I had occasion to deal with him personally when in 1978, '79, the first big pact was a courier service that came to St Vincent and he became the agent for FedEx shortly after that. But he is also well known as someone who has worked with Dr Earl Kirby and the National Trust in going through the hills over at Forte Charlotte, when people use to wonder what they were digging for when they go over to Forte and down to Bum Proof, that I remember very well.

Mr. Connell gave service as a President of the St Vincent Chamber of Industry and Commerce from 1964-1970 and again from 1983-'84, at the highest Leadership. I am also advised that he was a steering member of the '*Alliance Francois*', when it was established here and he served as President of the Employers Federation, from 1988-1993. He was a member also of the Boys Scout Association and I recalled a dear friend speaking to me last Thursday saying that she was so upset when she did not see any Boys Scout turning out to his funeral.

He was in the Boys Scout movement up to 1991, when shortly thereafter, himself, Samuel Commissiong, and myself began to work with the Boys' Scout when their headquarters was established. He also served as a fellow Anglican on the Board of the Incorporated Trustees of the Anglican Church from 1982, and they are responsible for maintenance of church properties and the purchase and sale of church lands, particularly for other worthy causes and purposes. I remember him very distinctly being involved with the renovation at Sion Lodge.

As a foundation member, of the St Vincent Children's Welfare Fund Committee established by our first Governor, Sir Rupert John; that established this committee and he would certainly remember to send tickets for our Children Welfare Fund activities to a lot of us. His last stint in public service so to speak was when he joined the House of Hope Society in its lodging and helping to find a place, a work place and a place of comfort and hospice care for AIDS persons. He was awarded the OBE in 1986. May he rest in peace.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Minister of Works, Honourable Member, for East St. George.

HONOURABLE CLAYTON BURGIN: Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my condolences to the family of the late Mr. Charles Duncan Hercules also known as Teacher Hercules, one of my constituents of blessed memory, who died at the age of ninety-three. He was a remarkable man Mr. Speaker, as was stated by the Minister of Education and also the Opposition Leader. I would not go into the details that they mentioned, but just to say that I have known him since I was a toddler being taken to church. While we were at the church Mr. Speaker and I sat next to you and behind the Opposition Leader and I think the part of the programme we all were looking forward to was the auto-obituary because in all our years we had never seen that. And we were just waiting to get down there to know what that was all about. As the Opposition Leader mentioned, his skill with the English Language that is just probably part of something that we never knew before.

Mr. Speaker the Leader of the Opposition mentioned about his eulogy, but it was stated that he wrote his own eulogy because nobody would say anything that is not true about him. [Laugh] So that is one of the reasons why he wrote it. He planned his own funeral service since, I think he was eighty-six then, when he planned that service and in the end he said “Don’t think he is selfish”. He chose three songs, three hymns and he left the others like those at the grave side for others to ... So he was not selfish over all.

Mr. Speaker, one thing I remembered in 2002, I paid a visit and he said over fifty years he is looking for markets for two products: and he said “Mr. Burgin, if you and the Prime Minister could find the market for those two products, St Vincent and the Grenadines is well on the way”. Well, I am not asking him what those products are because a man like him you have to wait until he says what he has to say. He said, “Those two products are ignorance and poverty”. And he said, “Anytime you find a market for those two you are on the way”. But he said for over fifty years he was trying and all the other governments tried and if we could come up for that that is something.

So, he had his sense of humour and everything. To the family, I really want to express my deepest sympathy and let them know that he touched the lives of the entire Vincentian society and persons at home and abroad have attested here before. May his soul rest in perfect peace.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Senator Leacock; I will take you after Senator Francis; Leacock.

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Speaker I rise to extend condolence to a number of people and I will be brief on those that have gone before. I start now with Ms. Miriam Moore, of Bottom Town, Rose Place in the early days and latterly Largo Heights, and then into Ottley Hall. Perhaps, not well known here but she was the mother of two of our most outstanding sports persons Guy and Raulty Loo, who contributed so much to football in St Vincent and the Grenadines here abroad and internationally. Well, of course, DILCO might feel he deserves some other honourable mention, but sometimes we could look back, what you say ‘by the fruits you can know them’. She was clearly an industrious person who in her own way made her contribution and I just want to extend my deepest condolence at this time to the bereaved family.

Speaker in that same breath I join with the Honourable Member for West Kingstown in identifying condolences to Dennis Samuel’s family, his mother Joan whose circumstances; electrocution was also quite tragic.

I move on very quickly to Peter Dennie, identified by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. A devote member of the New Democratic Party, a young democrat, a person with a very good spirit, because that Radio Station is very close to my home, I know of the several encounters between him and his boss Mr. Douglas De Freitas and the family. And even under the most trying circumstances you could not see him as being rude, difficult or unable to get along with, and certainly his contribution to radio station, to culture, to carnival and the coverage of football; I know he did a lot of work there for the Football Federation as well, he will be solely missed.

This is not the time for us to speculate, but surely Mr. Speaker we all hope that in a very quick time the Law Enforcement Agencies will be able to come to grips with those who apparently, and I underline apparently, may have snuffed out his life, because we must get to the bottom of this matter Mr. Speaker.

Speaker, I also wish to identify with the remarks for C.D. Hercules, by those who have gone before me and there is little I can do to embellish the very strong comments already indicated but I pause, a little longer Honourable Mr. Speaker on Arthur Connell. Like yourself; now I have to be very careful; I said like yourself an outstanding Jaycee. I think you deserve that you were a Senator after all. I think this is your second Senatorial stint, I believe, and it was good to see the Jaycees there in large numbers, showing their respect. Someone took notice of the fact that the Chamber of Commerce where he gave human service, they were relatively few in numbers and that was regrettably. If you go to funeral service as often as some of us do, sometimes you cannot help but regret the kind of attendance you see at some of these services for people who virtually gave their lives to St Vincent and it brings to memory how easily we forget the shoulders on those whom we stand today, as we make benefits to society. Mr. Connell clearly has made a great contribution in so many spheres of activities. These are people who went before you.

When I joined VINLEC he was in fact the President of the Employees Federation and when he left in '93, I replaced him for eight years and certainly very deep shoes to fill, but I think I did my best in identifying with his contribution. I also want to mention to Mr. Speaker that if I go back about thirty years, when I just came back as a graduate in management studies and decided to get into my own business, the Janitorial Service, the last sets of mops, buckets and chemicals that he had in stock I bought them. Because I think he also had it in mind that he should enter that field and I seemed to be just nose ahead of him, by buying out his stocks and put pain to his attempts.

It is a good thing Mr. Speaker because today as a friendly janitor it keeps me alive and I would always remember those contacts but clearly Mr. Speaker, Arthur Connell has made a remarkable contribution to St Vincent and the Grenadines, Jaycees, Chambers of Commerce, Employees Federation, businessman and church man, Scout Leader, just about every sphere of activity. And in people like him and C. D. Hercules we are reminded of the great humanity that exist in St Vincent and the Grenadines and the challenges that we have and the examples we have. Mr. Speaker may they all rest in peace.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Senator Francis, Minister for Housing et cetera.

HONOURABLE JULIAN FRANCIS: Mr. Speaker, I rise to join with my other colleagues who have expressed condolences for Mr. Hercules; Mr. Connell; and Peter Dennie. I just want to say on Peter Dennie, that

Peter obviously lends great testimony to there being no serious political divide in this country, because if the claims of the members on the other side are true, I know the Dennie's family is a very closely knitted family and Sherry who is very active in our Youth Arm of the Unity Labour Party and his father Amos who is an Executive Member of the Unity Labour Party they lived in harmony; so therefore, there is no great political divide in this country and I just want to ...

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: You are sure you know?

HONOURABLE JULIAN FRANCIS: I do not know if the red shades that he wore at his wedding spoke to deny the claims from the other side but he is now silent. On behalf, Mr. Speaker, of the Members of the Unity Labour Party, particularly being General Secretary of the Unity Labour Party, I really want to extend to Mr. Amos Dennie and his immediate family deepest condolences from the Unity Labour Party and from the Government and people of St Vincent and the Grenadines. We share a very close relationship and in fact the morning after the news broke, before I got ready for work I went to the hospital because Sherry was there and I thought that at least one of us should be there to share with her those sad moments. I trust that his dear wife Kenniesha will recover fully and that we will help to solve this mystery.

Mr. Speaker, I rise, my primary reason is to extend to the Marks family: Nolan Marks; Pearly Marks; former Senator Ronnie Marks; and the very extended family of Ricky Marks, sincerest condolences and a heartfelt lost at the sudden demise of Ricky. It so happened that his funeral clashed the same day with Mr. Hercules but there was an outpouring in the valley of persons from all walks of life who attended this funeral.

Ricky developed himself in a very short space of time at age thirty-eight. He carried one of the largest trucking fleets in St Vincent and the Grenadines, owning bulldozers; excavators; backhoes; stonerollers; trucks and buggies. He was a very selfless individual Mr. Speaker, I recalled. I always experiment with my four wheel drive vehicles and one night I got stuck in a rainstorm in Byera Mountain, when the jeep fell into a hole and all the wheels were spinning and someone had to come and rescue me that night; way after nine, ten o'clock that night. It was following a couple storms that we had, I think it was 2004, and I had to leave the jeep there and the next day Ricky said that he would get the jeep out for me.

We tried the top road but we could not make it so he went for the big excavator, and we went from Byera side and went up; and while he was going up the bank side for the river broke and his excavator ended up in the river. So, we had to leave then and go back for his bulldozer, to pull out his excavator before I could get out of my jeep and I said to him well you know... he said "Na! Na! Na! All of us in the same kind of business man, if I was stuck you would have come and get me out too" there was no cost to it.

That was the type of individual that Ricky was. Very enterprising and I know that his family would miss him dearly, all of us. In fact there were very close knit relationship the Marks family and the Tom Pope's family whose daughter Ricky married and I want to extend our condolences to Claire and Doukey on his loss and we will be there in support of you in the future. Thank you very much Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable ...

HONOURABLE JULIAN FRANCIS: If I may just add, forgive me, but I want to mention the other passenger who was in the truck with Ricky, we know him as Shines, Shines Maloney, his real name is Allister Maloney, and I also take the opportunity to extend condolences to his lady and family on his loss. Thank you.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Member for West, St George.

HONOURABLE MICHAEL BROWNE: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker, I will not be long, I want to share the words expressed earlier in relation to Mr. C. D. Hercules, he was a contemporary and colleague of my father who also was an Educator. He was very much one of my father's partners and spent a lot of time in our house and in a sense I was influenced by people like himself into the field of education, and I want to also extend condolences to his family. On that particular day, I had three funerals at 3 o'clock; I wanted to go to the one for Ricky Marks; the Hercules one, but I also had a constituent, Mr. Wallace and I attended that. It went late and I was unable to go to Mr. Hercules's funeral.

I want to also extend condolences to the Mark's family. I was out of the country on government business in Guatemala when the accident took place and I subsequently spoke with his brother ex Senator Ronnie Marks. His mother Pearly was a student of mine, at the Teacher's College and indeed his wife's mother Clara was also a student of mine at the Teacher's College and I extend condolences to the relevant families.

The sudden and tragic loss of another of our youths in the form of Peter Dennie is worrying and as Senator Francis pointed out that family is a living example of political togetherness now. Because Pastor Dennie: Peter's father is the current Chairman of the West St George ULP Constituency Council. I was totally shocked to get the news. When I had called Pastor Dennie; on a different matter, very early in the morning, only to be told of this yet another tragedy. The Executives of our Constituency Council rallied with Pastor Dennie the night, we went to his home and there was a strong turnout of executive members to express support and solidarity. We too look forward to the unearthing by the authorities, into circumstances surrounding his death and we hope there could be quick clarification as to what transpired. On behalf of myself, family and the constituent of West St George, I want to extend condolences again to Pastor Dennie, to Gloria, Sherry and other members of the family. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Before we finish here with Obituaries and I do not want to prolong this but it would be rather remiss of me if I did not pay tribute to the lives and contributions of some of the persons that were mentioned here this morning. And I am very glad that the Honourable Senator Leacock did mention Senator Connell, who I want to begin with his contributions to the Jaycees.

Senator Connell was the first President of the St Vincent's Jaycees somewhere in the very early sixties when the organisation began here and I think he served for about three or so years consecutively. And he made a tremendous contribution to the development of that organisation. And one of the notable things about Senator Connell is that you were not as a young Jaycee too small for him to pay attention to. He considered everyone... He considered our own growth and development within the organisation because it was an organisation that was really meant to help to develop young people. And he paid very much attention to us and our development.

Apart from being the first President he was about the first Jaycee Senator for St Vincent and the Grenadines and served as a Chairman of the Senate body for quite some time. We in the Jaycees and I speak particularly for the Jaycees this morning, We in the Jaycees certainly will miss Senator Connell and the contribution that he continued to make to that organisation and to St Vincent and the Grenadines as whole. We wish his wife Elaine and all other members of the family all the best.

I must make mention also of Peter Dennie. Peter Dennie I know quite well and his father is also the moderator of the Evangelical Church of the West Indies, the church to which I am affiliated. As I said, the Dennies are quite well known to us, Gloria and Amos, the whole family as a matter of fact, and we are very burdened at this time with the lost of his dear son Peter, always a very vibrant and such like character; and I am sure they are very much cut up about the whole situation. I know that it has not been easy for Gloria his mother, but I pray that God will continue to give her the strength to bear even at this particular time.

The Mark's family I do know quite well and I do express my own condolence to them on the passing of Ricky. Much has been said about him a very wonderful young man and again we wish them all the best. To the Hercules family also, they are from East, St George, the constituency from which I originate and I know Hercules very well, and I wish that family all the best as well. Thank you.

CONGRATULATORY REMARKS

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs, Representative of Central Leeward.

HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker the Prime Minister was supposed to bring congratulatory remarks on behalf of six outstanding Vincentians who have been graciously honoured by her Majesty the Queen, in her 'New Years Honours List'; he did not have the time and since we have the space I thought that I would try to do the honours for him. And so without going into much detail because I was not the one who was supposed to do this, nevertheless, I feel it a great sense of honour to offer congratulations to those who have been so honoured earlier this year. To leave it until the next sitting of the House will make it a little stale. So, Mr. Speaker, I will like to offer congratulations to the Reverend Authur Huskins Huggins, a man who has spent many years in the field of religion making outstanding contribution to Anglicanism and has attained to the highest level in his religion, I believe he was one of those who were considered to be the Archbishop of the West Indies, Bishop of the West Indies.

HONOURABLE RENE BAPTISE: Diocese.

HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER: Diocese of the West Indies but he is now retired, yet he gives valuable service to the community and to his church, a very humble man and a great Vincentian and deserving of the honour placed upon him the (CMG), which is The Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George.

I will like to offer congratulations also to Mr. Alphaeus Nathaniel Jack, who was awarded the Officer of The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. A man who has excelled in business in St Vincent and the

Grenadines, from humble beginnings where he used to move around selling caps and articles of clothing and cloth. In St Vincent and the Grenadines, he has one of the most imposing and outstanding business here in Kingstown.

He is my co-religionist, an ardent Seventh Day Adventist and a great community man; making great contributions not only to St Vincent as a whole but particularly to his village of Richmond Park and the schools there that are associated with the Seventh Day Adventist: the Primary School and the Mountain View Academy. We applaud the great contribution he has made and congratulate him for the honour placed upon him.

Also Dr. Timothy Leroy Providence, who was also awarded The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE). All of us know about Dr. Providence, a man who has given many years of service in the field of medicine as well as community services, hails from the most outstanding family or one of the most outstanding families, that hails from Troumaca. A very humble man; a quite man; but one who has brought healing to many people in this country, he too is retired and certainly we applaud him for the great work that he has done here in this country as a Medical Doctor and in his community and I certainly think he is most deserving of the honour placed on him.

We also will like to congratulate Ms. Anesta Rodney, she was awarded the (MBE), a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, Mrs. Rodney has taught for many years, my colleague here says, probably her whole life, probably that is the only vocation she had. And she has served her community well in Troumaca, many students in that area have passed through her hands. A very humble lady, a very dedicated person to her family, to her community and we think that she is well deserving of the honour of 'MBE' awarded to her.

Ms. Cacheta Iselma Mathews Williams, who has been awarded: 'the Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire' (MBE). She is from Greggs, a woman who has been a banana farmer has branched off into other areas of activity like block making and entrepreneur, my co-religionist also, ardent member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, but one who has given of her whole life to the community and to the areas of agriculture and small business. A great model and example for people in that community and in St Vincent; an excellent woman, we want to congratulate them all.

There are those who would speak in derogatory terms about receiving these honours from Her Majesty the Queen but as long as we remain under our constitutional system in which she is the Head of State, we would be accepting these honours and even some of those who criticise; they do it out of jealousy. They themselves would gladly accept it, if it was ... [laughter] not throwing any words; if it were to be given to them. But we want to congratulate these worthy Vincentians; we have spent a long time praising people who are now dead and passed away and have made their contributions and it is proper that we should do that. Certainly, those who are alive and have made their contribution, we want to give them their due while they are alive. Many of them come from very humble beginnings, humble walks of life. Many from the rural areas but they have made their contributions to their communities and their country. We want to put it on record that we recognised their great contributions, and we recognise them while they are alive and congratulate them and wish them well. Thank you Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Leader of the Opposition. Senator Leacock, which of you?

HONOURABLE SIR LOUIS STRAKER: Mr. Speaker please pardon me, I missed Ms. Gunsam, Ms. Muriel Dorothy Gunsam who was also awarded the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. Many of us know Ms. Gunsam with her business next to JUICEE. A woman who has great community spirit makes contributions to many areas in sport and other community activities. We know her husband well who has passed on and she has been carrying on in the business. A great business woman, we want to congratulate her for receiving the (MBE), and wish her very well, as she continues to serve this country and the community in the area of business Thank you.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourble Leader of the Opposition.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker I wish to offer congratulations to those persons who have received honours from Her Majesty the Queen. The Deputy Prime Minister has just given a brief description of their contributions and without being invidious I will like to just say a couple of words about two of those persons.

First of all I would like to identify with the remarks in relation to Father Huggins. That is a gentleman for whom I have the utmost respect although, I am not an Anglican, I am very much aware about his contribution to St Vincent and the Grenadines. Indeed as a youngster at one time a big part of his family was living at Edinboro, where I was born and grew up, so I have known him for a very, very long time. I also participated in a number of services in the Anglican Church, at which he officiated, and those services that also honoured him.

And I must say that every time I listened to Father Huggins preach, he leaves something with you. He leaves something with you that will have some influence on your life. Some influence in the way you conduct your life. You know, they remind us all the time that we are all sinners, saved by grace and whenever I listened to him I become very, very conscious of my own frailties. So, to me he is the person for whom I have the greatest respect and I am pleased that he has been honoured.

I also want to say a brief word about Mr. Alphaeus Jack. When I was Manager of the Development Corporation, in the early '70s Mr. Jack was one of those first persons who came to that corporation to get a loan to expand his business. Very humble man, he and another gentleman named Mr. Bacchus from the same area, who made caps, and Mr. Jack made school uniforms. I was pleased that we were able to provide him with a loan through the Small Industry Credit Scheme, which had been established here by the Caribbean Development Bank.

And when one looks at how he has progressed from the '70s to what he represents now, in terms of the business community, it is really a very amazing performance and I sincerely congratulate him as well as all the others who have been honoured. I want to say however, that with respect to those honours we need to spend some time in speeding up in terms of getting our own National Honours. While it is true that these honours have been here with us for years, I think the time has more than come when we should get back the process on track to have our own National Honours.

I also want to briefly, Mr. Speaker, to congratulate, the new President of the United States, Barack Obama: the first black man to become President of that great country. I think the significance Mr. Speaker, of his election to that high office speaks volumes for many of us, in all parts of the world. Here in St Vincent and the Grenadines, it was so obvious the outpouring of happiness which one perceived both at the time of his election and at the time of his inauguration. It really was something that touched the hearts of our people very deeply. And that is understandable and indeed I am happy that it happened because there is great significance for us great significance on his accession to such high office.

I listened to his address at the inauguration; I listened and have taken note of the inclusiveness of his approach in terms of how he intends to conduct affairs in the United States by even appointing some members from the Party which ridiculed him. But he has indicated his commitment and I have heard a lot of talk, they tell you about together now, but that is not the same thing. [Laughter] Not the same thing at all, and I believe Mr. Speaker that President Obama would be able to identify this black man when President Bush could not do so because he could not see him.

But I say this, apart from the politics; his election is a great event in the history of this world. [Applause] A great event in the history of the black man, and while he did not campaign in that manner there is no doubt about the influence and the impact of his election on many persons who regard themselves as unfortunate and struggling to survive, black and white. And therefore, I wish him well Mr. Speaker, I wish him well as he goes about the business of making the changes that he committed himself to in his election campaign.

I know there are hiccups here and there but one expects that in politics, but one cannot forget the central message that he presented. He wants to change America for the better, so that all, and I emphasise, all can benefit and not a privileged few. And as he goes about his business in that regard Mr. Speaker I feel confident that he will succeed.

You know when he was actually taking the Oath of Office and the Chief Justice was in fact administering the oath I noticed that he stopped and he smiled. He is unlike many people; he recognised that the Chief Justice had made a mistake in what he was saying and rather than repeat the mistake he stopped and smiled, that was sufficient to nudge the Chief Justice to repeat what was the correct way to administer the Oath. If a man at that point and time with millions of people all over this world and in front of him still had the presence of mind to distinguish what is in fact a slight error and to wait for it to be corrected it tells you about his composure his ability to be clear under pressure.

You know it is an amazing thing ... you have seen him taking the oath again and I guess that has some legal basis for doing that. But I cannot forget the impact he has had on me, the impact he has had on Vincentians and in this case the High School thing that showed on CNN; The Girls High School is a good example of how involved, how much feeling, and how much emotion was being expressed here in little St Vincent and the Grenadines and I look forward not for him to be doing things for St Vincent particularly, but if he does things for the economy of the United States and the economy of the rest of the world, then he would be doing something for St Vincent and the Grenadines. And in that way I look at his Presidency and I wish him God's speed. Much obliged.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Senator ... I will take Senator Leacock and then I will take you afterwards. It is on your own behalf this time.

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Mr. Speaker, I believe the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister wants to make amends for the slight mistake of not identifying with President Obama, and I am prepare to give way to allow that courtesy and then come back after him if he does not mind M. Speaker. [Interjection]

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: But also, he was speaking on behalf of the Prime Minister first. I believe he is doing it now on his own behalf. Right?

HONOURABLE SIR LOUIS STRAKER: Thank you Mr. Speaker for being so gracious and I want to assure the Senator that it was not an error in omitting paying compliments to the President of the United States. We did that in this House soon after his election [applause] we did speak in a fulsome way of the significance of the election of President Barack Obama and I spoke on that issue.

But less it be misinterpreted unless somebody get propaganda out of it that the government side, the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister who has some stake in what is happening in the United States did not recognise the significance of the occasion, I must rise and offer congratulation to the President of the United States of America on his inauguration.

I looked at the inauguration and of course, as one who has spent thirty one years of his life in that country, studied Political Science and have worked for twenty five years in one of the major institutions on Wall Street, one who has his family still in the United States, my children were all born in the United States and now my five grandchildren, I look forward to a better America. One that would inspire my children who might want to be President of the United States and who might have had doubts as to whether they would be able to scale such stupendous heights and of course, the slogan was very appropriate: 'Yes we can'.

For a man who has started his life as a community organiser and went on to be a State Legislator and a first term Senator in the United States Senate, it is no mean accomplishment. I have to reflect at times and say that it was his destiny to be President and it seems as if Divine providence has so organised this situation that he would have him not only winning all the way up to being the nominee of the Democratic Party, but winning the election. We congratulate not only him but the Democratic Party of which we are a part because we are all members of the Socialist International, the Democratic Party and the Unity Labour Party here.

And I look forward to meeting President Obama in April in Trinidad when the Prime Minister and I go to the Summit of the Americas; we look forward to discussing issues of great importance to our two countries and our region and the United States, particularly in the area of trade and other areas that we have previously discussed, as recently as last year or 2007 with President Bush when we sat down with him and I was privileged to be with the Prime Ministers meeting with President Bush, but that was not my first occasion, he and I shared the platform and spoke at the graduation in Connecticut at a Naval Academy when a young man from St. Vincent: Sayers was graduated. But I think it is a great time not only for the United States but the world. A time when there seems to be conflicts and there seems to be misunderstanding between different regions, different religions that he with his name Barrack Hussein Obama might be able to reach out to areas where hitherto former

Presidents could not reach out. The Middle East with all the tensions that are taking place there, the situation in Afghanistan that he has inherited there, and I trust that it would not be a quagmire for him that would thwart him from moving forward, his domestic agenda, his relationship with other parts of the world and the goodwill. The honeymoon, the out pouring of support that he is receiving from all over the world would not turn sour in his engagement in Afghanistan. But for peace in the world, he has an excellent opportunity of improving the image of the United States.

And in our own region here the situation with Cuba he has started on the right foot. He seems to be upholding something that is more honoured in theory than in practice, the idea of human rights, respect for human rights, and the rule of law. The fact that he has taken such an early step in the situation in Cuba is an indication that he is willing to reach out and meet people and put his country on the right footing so that the United States can once again regain the respect that it once had in the world.

Mr. Speaker, for us here in the Region and most of us are descendants of African slaves: we are black, there are those who have said that he did not go through the experience that most black American have gone through because his father was from Africa, his mother is a white woman and he went to school in Indonesia, et cetera. But nevertheless as long as you are black and I was a black Caribbean American, no longer an American, that is why I said was, [laughter] and I entered the United States at a time as I said before of the great Civil Rights struggle and I was there in Washington when Martin Luther gave his famous 'I have a Dream' speech and it was out of that Civil Rights struggle that I became the third person of one of the greatest banks on Wall Street, Chemical, to become a management trainee. It is because of that struggle that I was able to be hired and it is out of that struggle that he has been able to become President of the United States of America. So that is not lost upon us. But he could not have done it as a black man. He did it as a man with a programme that would meet the needs of the people of the United States, white and black [Applause] and he did it in such a way that he can reach out to the rest of the world that he is probably one of the most popular Presidents worldwide particularly in Europe; white section of the world.

We here look forward to working with President Obama in the area of trade and in the area with the Offshore Banking that the Leader of the Opposition made mentioned that I have had back of my mind but we trust that something can be worked out in an amicable way to the benefit of our region. And so for every young boy and girl who feels that he has been born in a disadvantage manner; Senator Leacock and I, who are able to have the vision, the ambition. We were not born, you and I were not born with the golden spoon in our mouths but we can aspire to moving forward and upward as Barack Obama has done.

I have had a stint of teaching in the United States and I must admit there is much to be desired in many of my black brothers and sisters in the United States. I tell you my experience, you go to school and I taught in a black school where children would just form a group, turn their backs to the teachers and they talk and if you could maintain a semblance of discipline; I am talking about a High School, you would have accomplished much. But I trust that this would inspire black children not only in the United States but here and elsewhere that despite the fact that the cards might be stacked against them, if they study hard and Barack Obama is an outstanding lawyer who taught law in Chicago. If you can study hard and have the ambition that you can achieve something, that all of us can say 'yes we can'; that is the inspiration of the moment. And that is why we are proud that he has become President of the United States. I must say that this has to be divinely ordained because not even the

black leaders, many of them ever thought -- Jessie Jackson was one of those and Lewis the Congressman, John Lewis and others who thought it was impossible but in his own way he has made what seemed impossible possible.

And this is why this Government is committed to the Education Revolution so that poor boys and girls might be equipped, taken out of poverty; long ago education in a secondary school were for those who could only be driven to school and picked up in a car, but today boys and girls, poor boys and girls can be benefitted by this education revolution that we have started here that they too [Applause] now can be Prime Ministers of St. Vincent and Governor Generals and attain to the highest level. That is the programme that we are putting in place here in St. Vincent, so that we walk in step and when the President brings in people from the other Party, when he tries to make it all inclusive, that is what we did with the Constitutional Reform Movement why we brought in the Leader of the Opposition [Applause] we said 'together now', but he despised that. So, we have been working...Obama has taken a leaf from out of our book [Applause] working together bringing in the Opposition and we have been moving together and Obama is following what we have set in pace.

So, Mr. Speaker, we thank God for his election and we look forward to a great period not only in America but throughout the world as he gives leadership to the world and the inspiration, what he represents might lead us into higher heights as we experience greater prosperity; nevertheless that we are in a period of a financial melt down: an economic crisis, we trust that with the help of God he can lead us out of this situation, lead his country out of that situation and we will enjoy peace and prosperity in the United States and the rest of the world. I thank you. [Applause]

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Senator Leacock, I recognise you but I just want to say to Members we have been going almost 2^{1/2} hours on Obituaries and Congratulatory Remarks so...and we have the rest of the agenda to deal with. Senator Leacock.

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I do not believe it is an accident that the Honourable Sir Louis Straker, Deputy Prime Minister has had the opportunity this morning or this afternoon to speak to this Honourable House and to congratulate Barack Obama. And I am very glad that I give way to him because it helps to augment my own recognition of the importance of Barack Obama coming to the Presidency of the United States of America.

Mr. Speaker, if you would permit me I want to share very briefly an experience that I had as a young soldier in Canada, First Battalion in the Royal Canadian Regiment [Laughter] and we had a weekend off, (that is joke for you), we had a weekend off, Mr. Speaker, and my roommate took me to his family's home, [Interruption] I am saying that I was trained in Canada with the First Battalion in the Royal Canadian Regiment where I became a qualified soldier and officer...[Interruption]

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, please allow the Member to make his contribution.

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: ... and on that weekend, Mr. Speaker, I was taken to the home of my roommate, to the family and he gave me Mr. Speaker, a room in the family's house to stay and I recalled,

Mr. Speaker, that as often as I would open that door of that room to go about the house a dog would attempt to get into that bedroom, I was naïve and perhaps did not understand the significance of what was taking place.

It was years later Mr. Speaker, not only did I recognised it but my colleague by a note apologised to me that in fact, the room in which he had placed me to stay at the family's residence was the room of the dog. It may sound like a joke, but he meant well to take me to the family's home but he could not go the next step in family's dwelling to treat me as an equal as he would have done on the Army Base. It is not my only experience of racism, Mr. Speaker, but it is something that has stood with me until now [Interruption]. There is a time for serious business, Mr. Speaker, and the significance of what I am speaking you will never realise Minister Francis and you should really apologise.

Mr. Speaker the coming into being of President Obama is of major significance for the black man the world over, as the Honourable Deputy Leader stated and for all of us Vincentians and for all races, because we are of by nature a country where racism does not raise its ugly head. Thank God for that Mr. Speaker. But we... not too often at least, but we cannot be naïve about it Mr. Speaker, that when President Obama says 'Yes we Can'. It means for me as a Vincentian politician that, yes one day I can be a representative in this House duly elected by the people of Central Kingstown or the other constituency and its really fortuitous that it is Minister Straker who is addressing the House this morning because we can come here and we can speak of those who have received Queen's Awards and Honours. I have received like you Mr. Straker and the Honourable Speaker, awards from the Queen, you know, Her Majesty the Queen I too have received those awards you know.

And Mr. Speaker, we have to understand that the president of the United States of America, I do not want to be facetious or narrow about it because I know what our sovereignty means, but there are perhaps more Vincentians first, second and third generations in the United States of America than there are here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Certainly, Brooklyn is as large a capital as Kingstown is and the Honourable Member, the Deputy Prime Minister himself has admitted to spending nearly half of his life just a little less than that in the United States of America; for 31 years and his family still resides there. Very, very important decision I am sure in his own life, his own personal development.

And when those of us have listened very carefully and followed the progress of Obama, something we never believed could happen in our lifetime. It has lifted us as a people, Mr. Speaker, to a height where we now can truly believe in ourselves that the sky is the limit and when you listen even more carefully Mr. Speaker, of his ideals that the strength of his nation is not the guns and the army and military in the United States of America, but in their beliefs, liberty, in justice and in democracy; they are the same things,. Mr. Speaker, we have to reinforce here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, because St. Vincent... he said this... he was not speaking about several United States, it is one United States of America; well it is the same thing for us Mr. Speaker, we might be a plural country but certainly we must always be one people in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. And whoever has the temporal privilege to be a Prime Minister of this country, blessed land, must always remember St. Vincent is for all Vincentians, without colour, class, race or creed, we have a right Mr. Speaker, to live and progress here.

And so Mr. Speaker, I not only salute Obama's success but today is for me a day to recognise others, great black heroes, Nelson Mandela of course comes to mind, Mr. Speaker, Martin Luther King, these are the people

that I expect to hear named as outstanding world leaders, Mr. Speaker. These are the names that uplift me as a person and inspire others in our society and I can only wish him well, Mr. Speaker.

I noticed the Republican Party has moved very quickly to draw a leaf, I believe out of the Democratic Party in Michael Steele who has come to lead the RNC. We did not perhaps believe something like that could happen so quickly, Mr. Speaker. But those of us of liberal philosophies Mr. Speaker, again salute the ascendancy to Barack Obama for the presidency and I believe ultimately it will mean a better life for all Vincentians because his contribution would easily surpass all those around us and near us which we seem to exalt and I can only join with others in wishing him great success. Much obliged, Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Senator Francis.

HONOURABLE JULIAN FRANCIS: Mr. Speaker, I would be very brief. Naturally, I join also in congratulating Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States because I feel linked to him, he is a small island man as well, he grew up in Hawaii, and I think he has a broader perspective as to how island states could operate and I look forward to greater things coming from him.

I just want to establish one thing because sometimes I hear statements being made and the public is misled. The New Democratic Party is linked to the Republican Party. Let us establish that, the George Bush and the Republican Party, and the Unity Labour Party is linked to the Democrats; so let us not ever forget that. The history and present situation, that is how it is internationally, that the New Democratic Party is linked to the Republican Party of the United States and internationally the Unity Labour Party is linked to the Democrats, Democratic Party. So I want to congratulate not only President Obama but the return of the Democrats to the White House [Applause] as the international political party in the United States that we are linked with or the political party that we are linked with politically.

Mr. Speaker, and in particular I would like to congratulate President Obama for three acts that he has carried out so far.

1. His first interview was on a Arab TV, I think an excellent move by an international.. a President a world President who wants to see things go differently and with the troubles that we are having in that part of the world I thought it was an excellent strategy on his part, not many may agree with him.

2. I want to congratulate him that the first act, one of the first acts that he carried out was a matter of Guantanamo and I have no doubt that under the Presidency of Barack Obama that the blockade will be lifted against Cuba [Applause]. I have no doubt in my mind about that [Applause] and

3. Just yesterday morning or day before yesterday morning, I heard that when President Obama comes to Trinidad that he would be meeting with President Chavez out of Venezuela to hold discussions with him and I want to congratulate President Obama on first in the Region identifying Cuba and then identifying President Chavez out of Venezuela. That is my congratulatory remarks Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Minister for Culture.

HONOURABLE RENE BAPTISTE: Mr. Speaker, I would be extremely brief, it would not even take five seconds. I rise to congratulate the National Nine Mornings Committee, remember we did not have a meeting in January, on hosting the 10th Anniversary of the festival and in particular Sion Hill for staying for 10 years with the lighting up. These are some of the little things that we must remember to thank people for in that in 1999 it appeared as though Nine Mornings was about to disappear and like-minded individuals just four of them, as one said, when he sang he went in the audience to clap as music continues to play. Now, no doubt we can see the growth and expansion of the Nine Mornings into full ledged festival embracing the entire country and it is now... it has its own website and is a strong drawing card for visitors and friends and relatives back home.

And also to congratulate those persons with the New Years Honour list whom I know personally and the Bequia Tourism Association for the 6th hosting of the Bequia Music Festival which is growing in strength and continuing to cement the unique style of music out of Bequia and Basil Charles for continuing with the Mustique Blues, its 14th year particularly as funds from this go towards the Basil Charles Foundation which is set up to continue to support education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Thank you.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: That is the end of Congratulatory Remarks. Madam Clerk I think that is it there, we move on with the rest of the agenda.

I will tell you what we are going to do, it is now...what I will suggest that we do, its now twenty minutes to one,... do you want us to go through the questions? Okay, at least I think we can start the questions. The Honourable Minister of Tourism is not at his very best and of course would like to get out of this cold place.

In the mean while let me take this opportunity under Announcement by Speaker to extend to every Member of this Honourable House a happy New Year. [Applause] This is our first meeting for the year and we are thankful to God that we have come through 2008 and we are now into 2009 and I as spoke with an Honourable Member of this House this morning he has pledged that he is going to try to lift his own game and I am sure in this Honourable House and I am hoping that this would be the pledge of each of us that we will try to lift our game here and that we will make this House a real Honourable place. I trust that God would bless us in our various contributions as we continue to address the varying issues that we have to deal with here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and would make the people of this blessed country proud of us. Thank you, very much.

Statements by Ministers, we would forego that part for the time being and then I think we would... Madam Clerk I have taken over your responsibility.

PETITIONS

HONOURABLE SELMON WALTERS: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I wish to present the petition of the Trustees of the Seventh Day Adventist Churches here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The Seventh Day Adventist Churches have grown to the point where St. Vincent is now recognised as a region in that organisation and behalf of the Government and people of St. Vincent I want to commend the church for that growth and for the job they are doing in uplifting the holistic development of the Human Resource here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The petition is presented here by:

Eugene Daniel Pastor

Cyril Howell	Secretary
Neville Freedy	Treasurer
Dermott Baptiste	Coordinator
Selwyn Jones	Trustee
Elaine Thomas	Trustee

The church is pledging here to uphold the moral dignity and spiritual welfare of all the Vincentian people. I wish them all the best in that pursuit, Mr. Speaker, as I present the petition.

This other one is from the Hope Evangelism Outreach, they are located at Calder and they are also pledging to uphold the spiritual, moral fabric of the Vincentian society pledging the holistic development of the people, this one is signed by:

Myrtle Jack	Leader
Riesha Jack	Treasurer
Sharon France-Charles	Trustee/Secretary
Joseph Jack	Trustee
Gordon Shallow	Trustee
Vernice Allen	Trustee
Brenton Charles	Trustee
Merwinson Jack	Trustee
Benjamin Hackshaw	Trustee

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members I present these two petitions for incorporation to this Honourable House. Much obliged.

QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWERS

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Question No. 2 Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask question No. 2 standing in my name of the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

2. *The Honourable Arnhim Eustace (Leader of the Opposition), to ask the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:*

What is the reason for Vincentian Andrew Simmons' dismissal from the Agricultural Diversification Program.

HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL: Mr. Speaker, this Government in 2002 for the first time in the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries set up an Agricultural Diversification Implementation Unit to drive the Agriculture Diversification Programme here in St. Vincent. In that year the sum of some \$750,000 was budgeted to establish the programme and which was subsequently financed by the European Union. The records to date show that Mr. Ashley Caine was employed as the Project Manager and he is still the Project Manager, all other supporting staff, the Accountant, the Rural Development Officer, and other members of the clerical staff, all are still in place.

The record shows, never ever was Mr. Andrew Simmons hired by the Diversification Unit for any such position and therefore, he could not have been dismissed. This question I consider very irrelevant in the circumstances. I thank you.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Leader of the Opposition, supplementary question?

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Mr. Speaker, the question does not ask anything about the unit it asked why he was dismissed from the programme, it is quite a different thing, so I regard the answer as irrelevant.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you want to respond to? You did not ask a question, so there is no need to respond. I think this whole question relates to the FAO, and not to the Agriculture. I think he has answered the question. [Interjection] Well you did not ask for a supplementary, so. He is challenging the answer whether you answer the question. Do you have an explanation to it? Would you want to do that, if you so want to so do it.

HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL: Mr. Speaker, I answered the question, the question asked, in terms; "What is the reason for Vincentian Andrew Simmons dismissal from the Agricultural Diversification Programme." He was never a part of the programme.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, very much. Well, the Minister is saying he was not a part of the programme, I do not know anything else. I cannot answer you. Question No. 3. Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask question No. 3 standing in my name of the Honourable Minister of Tourism.

3. *The Honourable Arnhim Eustace (Leader of the Opposition), to ask the Honourable Minister of Tourism:*

What specific proposal/program does the Ministry have to address the fall-off in stay-over arrivals and tourism generally, in light of the present world economic and financial crisis?

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Minister of Tourism.

HONOURABLE GLEN BEACHE: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. But Mr. Speaker, we have had programmes in place for quite a while now, that we think work in the best interest of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and what is the product of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In terms of the financial crisis that is taking place, the Ministry from all its research, internationally and within the region, we knew that there would have been a drop off from early last year; because this financial crisis is not something new; and usually when one has a crisis, a financial crisis one of first things to suffer is that of travelling; people figure that they can do without a vacation, so they look to save more money. But Mr. Speaker, we took some steps last year that that we think would help in attracting visitors to St. Vincent and the Grenadines and building up the awareness internationally. For example in the United Kingdom and Europe, for the first time, we worked with a tour operator by the name of 'Responsible Travel' out of the United Kingdom and this was the first country to do this sort of project in the world, where we work directly with the tour operator, and these tour operators specialize in those travelers who are very environmentally conscious and Responsible Travel is very excited about this project, we started this by the time we got to contracts and everything and we do have a website, a specific website with them, we were up and running from October to the end of December we had over 10,000 hits on that website; I will try to get the bookings that we received from the website so far, but some of those advanced bookings have been made for November, this year, but as soon as we get those numbers, I can always present them to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

We also started work in Canada with a company called 'Total Vacations', first time also, and both of these tour operators, Mr. Speaker, these projects were done specifically for the stakeholders, the hoteliers, the small hotels especially; the Responsible Travel one is running us £45,000 a year; Total Vacations, we are working with them and we have certain packages on Total Vacations on which the stakeholders are able to register with them and promote their own packages with one what we call a medium size tour operator. We did not want to go with one of the largest ones because we will get lost and obviously we did not want to go with one of the smaller ones because they just would not do enough business for us.

On top of that Mr. Speaker, we see Canada as one of the countries that we see out of the developed countries that has withstood this financial crisis best of all; so we paid a bit more attention to Canada of late. At present, anybody who has family within Toronto, Canada, we have a special promotion going on with Quiznos: Quiznos Subs, most of you would have seen their ads, in which the last ten seconds of all of their ads, which is television and radio and of course naturally their printed ads, those last ten seconds on television and radio are

dedicated towards St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The winners of this would also be winning trips to St. Vincent and the Grenadines and we have stakeholders here taking part.

The shopping network within Canada also is celebrating its 40th anniversary and as a matter of fact, they were just down here last week. We are doing a special promotion with them also to try and get the name of St. Vincent and the Grenadines out here. We had something with Breakfast Television out of Canada. Breakfast Television is the equivalent of Good Morning America, in the United States, unfortunately before we could sign a contract, they were bought over by Roger's Communications and subsequently on Roger's taking over, they wanted an extra \$1 million or \$1.5 million for the project which we did not think was in our best interest, we could get more out of that money in other places, than with that only.

Now, part of the problem we are having right now, Mr. Speaker, is we need to be competitive in this industry. With the financial crisis taking place, people are looking for deals. St. Lucia, I know just advertised in the United States where their stakeholders are giving 75% off all rooms. Five star hotels in Jamaica are offering you \$50 per night and not only are they giving these sort of deals so the people coming into those countries are getting those deals, but what is taking place, even with the Journalists, the stories they are looking for at this time are stories that give their readership a good deal and so if you do not have these good deals then you are not getting the coverage. So even if you say at this present time, because of what is going on, that you are going to concentrate more on public relations, than on advertising, you have to have something there more for them to write on, and what they are looking for are the deals.

We met with the stakeholders here, last week Monday, the Tourism stakeholders, the Prime Minister and I and other senior staff members of the Ministry of Tourism and we are looking to see where we can soften the blow to a lot of our stakeholders. The Prime Minister announced in his budget about the \$25 million or \$26 million loan from NCB, that is one way we were looking to cushion the blow.

I had spoken to the Prime Minister in November about us looking at other ways to keep cash in the stakeholders' hands. I think when he comes and I know he announced it on Saturday, when he comes here he will announce about the electricity rates going from corporate to domestic for the hoteliers, tour operators, and the yachting sector and on top of that, the tax, the business tax, for the stakeholders, going from 30% to 20%, and this is one way because what you find in... and if you listen to the news, around the world, you find a lot of people within the tourism industry, losing their jobs, and this is one of the ways, that we as a government are hoping to keep some money in the stakeholders hands so that they could keep on staff as much as possible. As I said these two options that I mentioned to the Prime Minister in November and I am sure he will go further into detail about it when he makes his ministerial statements later on today.

Mr. Speaker, when I speak of competitiveness, I am not only speaking about the packages and the rates and so on, but also in terms of the complete product. As you know we have the tourism development project going on, presently, 18 sites throughout, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, hopefully we would be making an announcement on Vermont Nature Trails and the Botanic Gardens, sooner rather than later, they are about to come to completion. I know, many people are concerned about the Falls of Baleine, that project would be going out to tender soon enough and we have been having consultations all over the St. Vincent and the Grenadines on these projects.

One of the issues the stakeholders brought to our attention, not brought to our attention, we knew of it, but they brought it up again, is that of airfare, inter regional airfare, and the regional travel is St. Vincent and the Grenadines biggest market. And you know, one of our biggest times of the year is during Trinidad's carnival, approximately 50,000 people leave Trinidad during carnival because they do not want to be in Trinidad during that time. But one of the hindrances right now, is that of the Airfare from Trinidad to St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

We usually go on a blitz just before Trinidad's Carnival to get people to come up to St. Vincent and the Grenadines, it has always worked. But I know, speaking to our agency in Trinidad and them speaking to some of the Travel Agents, it is a problem. Because if you are paying anywhere between EC \$850 to \$950 to get from Trinidad to St. Vincent and the Grenadines and then you have Caribbean Airlines offering you US \$99 to Miami, you know it becomes a problem because obviously a lot of people would want to go to the United States, not everybody but quite a bit, so trying to make ourselves more competitive in that range and one of the things, we are doing right now, and hopefully by tomorrow, I will hear from LIAT, we are looking to start a programme of buy one ticket get one free, during Trinidad's carnival to come up to St. Vincent and the Grenadines. We think it will work, but to be competitive it has to be a complete package; it is not only about the Airfare, it is about our room rates. It is about our tour rates and we have to be competitive with these things.

I have said this to the stakeholders before that we need to take a page out of the cruise sector's books. Carnival Cruise Liner would not leave Miami or Puerto Rico with an empty cabin and they will not do it, because they know the cabin is not where they are going to make their money. Even if they have to sell that cabin at \$10, just two hours before they leave, they will sell it at \$10, because they know they are going to make their money on the drinks and food and the tours. And I am not saying that the stakeholders give away their rooms but in this day and age as the Leader of the Opposition says, at this time of the financial crisis we have to be competitive. And I gave examples before of what is being offered out there and those are just two countries.

In November I was looking at a British Newspaper and they had a four days, five nights, from the United Kingdom to Switzerland at \$374 Euros all inclusive, and that included airfare. So it gives you an idea of what we are going up against in terms and we just have to be competitive in what we do. There is no doubt in my mind about the product of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and how good it is, but we continue to work with our agencies, and they have been doing a tremendous job for us so far.

The Tourism Authority, we have had a bit of a fall back in terms of the CEO, I should be announcing the CEO next week. She should have started by February 1st but she has some personal issues. The Tourism Authority is basically up and running and we are looking for some creative ideas, ideas from them. The Board of the Authority is full of experienced people, even though their job is to guide the authority in terms of policy from the Ministry. But the technical people we have within the authority, I think, everybody would be pleased with those staff members. So we continue to work with all our stakeholders. We continue to work with our agencies in Canada, Trinidad and United Kingdom and the rest of Europe and we continue to be creative in many of the things we do. But the biggest thing right now is that we have to be competitive more than anything else.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary?

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Yes, Supplementary. Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very important issue for St. Vincent, the contribution of tourism we all know, is very significant. I heard the Prime Minister announced the tax concessions, for tourism, much of which you mentioned a while ago. But what I have not gotten from you, I did not get... are you saying that you are considering a shift in the advertising budget, or the promotion budget to bring tourists from other destinations like Canada which have not been so badly affected by the financial crisis, is that what you are saying, apart from the general issue of competitiveness.

HONOURABLE GLEN BEACHE: I am sorry, are you asking if we are shifting monies from other marketing areas into Canada?

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Let me put it this way, to what extent have you look at your promotion budget, in relation to the example you gave, about looking more to Canada for instance, because they are less affected by the financial crisis. Are you trying to change the mix in terms of your arrivals for stay over visitors, because that is the money area? In other words, United States is very prominent, you are looking at a shift to Canada, more shift to Europe where, is there any thinking in that direction?

HONOURABLE GLEN BEACHE: I do not want to say we are going to shift. The market change all the time, I spoke about Canada because of the figures we have coming out of Canada, in terms of how Canadians are travelling, and they tend to be travelling a lot more right now. So obviously, I know, if you speak to many Canadians they will tell you most of them have been to Cuba, so they are looking for the new destinations. And this comes from the research that we have done from what CTO has done. So because the Canadians seem to have withstood the financial crisis as much, I do not want to say we are going to shift funds from the United States over to Canada but I think you will see a bigger concentration in terms of public relations in Canada in terms of what we do with their Journalists and bringing them in. [Interjection] Pardon me? No, but public relations, I mean we have the PR Agencies, but when we are talking about strict public relations, public relations is not the same as advertising. [Interjection] It is part of it but it is not the same as advertising.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Alright. Question No. 6, Honourable Member for the Northern Grenadines.

DR THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask question No. 6 standing in my name of the Minister of Transport and Works.

6. Dr. the Honourable Godwin Friday (Northern Grenadines) to ask the Honourable Minister of Transport and Works:

The drain along the main road at Paget Farm, Bequia, like many drains elsewhere in the country, has been blocked for a long time and this has caused flooding in the main road when it rained:

Will the Honourable Minister give the assurance that urgent efforts will be made to clear this and other drains that are blocked and will he also state when this drain on the Paget Farm main road would be cleared.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Minister of Transport and Works.

HONOURABLE CLAYTON BURGIN: Mr. Speaker, upon investigation, this drain is blocked at the junction of the police station by a 100 pound gas cylinder. There is an estimate prepared to excavate the road to remove the cylinder and repair the area. Mr. Speaker, one would get from the question that the drain is blocked otherwise, but this is the main cause. And this brings me, Mr. Speaker, to once again to people not to dispose of their garbage, refuse, debris from construction site, old machinery, old stove, old typewriters and computers and other equipment in the drain and gutters.

Mr. Speaker, this may sound as a surprise to you but those are what come out of drains when the gangs and other persons clean these drains and we know and see the effects on the roads and people's properties when it rains.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Honourable... Supplementary?

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. The question actually, that was the trigger for the question, but the fact is drains all over the place are blocked, not just in Bequia, and the question does address, it says the Paget Farm drain and other drains that are blocked. For example, up at Spring, you cannot find the drains anymore, Union Level, in Pretoria...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary?

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: That is the supplementary, it is a clarification because has not been answered in full. He just dealt with the question relating to the main road drain in Paget Farm

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary is when would these drains be cleared? Is that the supplementary? I have not heard a supplementary.

HONOURABLE CLAYTON BURGIN: Mr. Speaker, drains are always cleaned every quarter and we know the topography of our lands, the rainfall, and debris always in the drains, you clean a drain today and rain comes tomorrow and the drain, debris in the drains and all those sort of things that I just mentioned before, so drains are always cleaned.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Question No. 8 from the Honourable Member of the Southern Grenadines. I think the Honourable Member for Northern Grenadines will ask the question.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: I rise to ask question No. 8 in the name of the Honourable Member for Southern Grenadines. And this is a question for the Minister of Transport and Works.

8. *The Honourable Terrance Ollivierre (Southern Grenadines), to ask the Honourable Minister of Transport and Works:*

The road at Happy Hill next to the Sandy's residence up to the Seventh Day Adventist Church at Grand Bay, Canouan needs to be re-cut and surfaced to provide an amenity to the residents.

Can the Honourable Minister please state when will attention be given to this road.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Minister of Transport and Works.

HONOURABLE CLAYTON BURGIN: Mr. Speaker, this road was cut partially by a resident. It needs to be cut by a bulldozer and upgrade to concrete. The technical officials will make an assessment on a visit plan for February, this month and then make a recommendation, as how we can proceed.

DR. THE HONOURABLE GODWIN FRIDAY: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask question No. 9 for the Honourable Member for Southern Grenadines; and to ask the Honourable Minister of Education.

9. *Honourable Terrance Ollivierre (Southern Grenadines), to ask the Honourable Minister of Education:*

What is our status in regards to the provision of NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) Certification along the lines of labour market demands to in-school and out-of-school persons, so as to make education for all more meaningful, relevant and equitable?

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Minister for Education.

HONOURABLE GIRLYN MIGUEL: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. The year 2000, St. Vincent and the Grenadines launched its STAVET project, the goal of the project was to transform St. Vincent and the Grenadines TVET sector by adapting the international competency based education and training model. From 2005 Competency Based Education Training in the TVET sector was placed on the priority list in education. In preparation for the National Vocation Qualification, and the Caribbean Vocational Qualification certified by the Caribbean Examination Council, a new multipurpose centre was built in Kingstown and Barrouallie, Georgetown and the Campden Park Centres were upgraded after the facilities audit was done.

The following activities were initiated; core programmes in basic computing, mathematics, communication, and entrepreneurship were introduced. The course materials, these are instructor guides, and student manuals from Hard Trust, Jamaica were bought under the STAVET project. Occupational standards were developed. Workshops were held with the staff of the institutions to prepare them for the National Vocational Qualification and Caribbean Vocational Qualification arrangements in the following areas. 1. Laboratory Organisation and Management, Occupational Health and Safety, Work attachment, on job training, competency based assessment and other related issues. Forty-five instructors received training at levels 1 and 2 to deliver competency based training. Thirty assessors received training, the programmes fore each centre were advertised. Programmes run in conjunction with those from the Adult and Continuing Education Unit.

Presently, St. Vincent and the Grenadines is wrapping up an Organisation for American States Hemispheric Project, in response to the provision of labour market competencies for in and out of school youths. I would

like also to let the Honourable Member know, that there is a document in the Ministry of Education that he can have from us if he would so desire.

The Campden Park Technical Institute is being upgraded through an authorised training organisation to provide administrative support for all centres and the Adult and Continuing Education Unit for registration, records, management, certification and a proper harmonisation for all programmes. The Adult and Continuing Education Unit is now restructured to facilitate the activities of adult learners and the skills upgrading for many of these out of school young people.

I want now to give a breakdown of cost for the full introduction of NVQ and CVQ in the secondary schools and technical institutes, thus far. For public financing, \$80,940.00; donor funds \$101,750; domestic \$10,117.50; private sector sponsoring \$101,117.50, giving us a total of \$293,925. Very much work is being done, Mr. Speaker, Honourable. I am very much obliged.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Question No. 11, Honourable Senator Leacock.

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask question No. 11 standing in my name and I ask this of the Honourable Minister of Transport and Works.

11. Major the Honourable St. Clair Leacock (Opposition Senator), to ask the Honourable Minister of Transport and Works:

As the election nears and interest in Central Kingstown is highlighted. Will the Honourable Minister indicate if and when the following roads and embankments will be improved:

a. That piece of main road in Green Hill from on or around Ms. Millington's residence, pass Ryan's shop and all the way to the Liberty Lodge Boys' Training Center;

b. The stretch of road from the area referred to as Hollywood i.e. on the corner of Cappy Laidlow's residence, to the turn off to Kingstown Park where a backwall and fenders are needed to protect the hundreds of passengers who commute on vans daily; and finally,

c. the area of Trigger Ridge just near the Lewis residence, just a few yards from the steps and Estan DeFreitas residence.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Minister of Transport and Works.

HONOURABLE CLAYTON BURGIN: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the opening in the preamble very interesting, 'as election nears' I do not know which election, because the good Senator did not specify, so you cannot accuse him of saying it is the general election or some other election. I do not know if it is the leadership in the NDP he is talking about. [Laughter]

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Answer the question

HONOURABLE CLAYTON BURGIN: All right, Mr. Speaker, but my good friend the Senator will tell me.

Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Representative has this on his requested list of work to be done that was presented to the Ministry of Transport and Works for 2009, and based on how the top priorities, out of the priority list go, it will be placed in the appropriate quarters works. [Interjection] It has four quarters, so when they look at the top priorities, out of that priority list.

(b) This area is in need of fenders as a means of protection. The height of the area however is over 100 feet, therefore a back wall would be very costly. And Mr. Speaker, I would like to do all these things that the Members, even on my side are seeking to get done, but we have hundreds of such areas in St. Vincent and the Grenadines based on our topography, so we have to see how best we can reduce the risk of any mishap by doing some precautionary things that would take into consideration the safety of everyone.

(c) There is an existing concrete road which has deteriorated over time because of bad drainage in this discussed area and the need for repair to this road is recognised not only by the Ministry but the Parliamentary Representative, who has mentioned it to me, after he would have given me his list with the requested number, that I instructed him to provide me, because you know Mr. Speaker, they tend to provide you with a long list that I cannot really fulfill for all of them so I give them a specific number but they would still come and request others after they has given me that, so I recognised that and we will look at that and see how best we can fix it and take into consideration what the Senator's concern is and also the Parliamentary Representative with this area that he has mentioned.

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: How come I never....?

HONOURABLE CLAYTON BURGIN: How come?

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: ...Parliamentary Representative... [Laughter]

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: [Laughs] Honourable....

HONOURABLE CLAYTON BURGIN: ...Suppose you give me the list.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Question No. 12 Honourable Member.

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Thank you again Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask question No. 12 standing in my name of the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

12. Major the Honourable St. Clair Leacock (Opposition Senator), to ask the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

How can farmers in Green Hill, Redemption Sharpes/Trigger Ridge and Largo Heights access the fertilizer that has been donated to the Government either for free or at a reduced cost.

HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL: Mr. Speaker, the farmers in Green Hill, Redemption Sharpes/Trigger Ridge and Largo Heights are no different to farmers of Rose Hall, of Vermont, of Marriagua, of Georgetown, of Fancy in accessing inputs whether it is fertilizer, or other inputs for farming.

In 2008 the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries provided support to the value of \$1.5 million freely to farmers who are producers of bananas, root crops which includes dasheen, eddoes, tancias, plantain farmers as well as arrowroot farmers. Mr. Speaker, fertilizers were distributed to over 2,300 farmers. The record shows...

HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL: The record shows that 593 farmers in District 4 of which Green Hill, Phaeton and Sharpes, all farmers have benefited and farmers who are as I called out, in the various categories. Equally, at the input warehouse fertilizer is being sold at \$120 per sack and Mr. Speaker, that is the cheapest fertilizer you can find anywhere in the Eastern Caribbean. I can say to you, that Jamaica makes fertilizers and you can get one sack of the same NPK fertilizer at about US \$200 per sack. And the farmers of this country are getting it at EC \$120 per sack.

Mr. Speaker, this is so because this government, it was this government that took that initiative of subsidizing the price of fertilizer to our farmers from the profits of sugar. Presently, Mr. Speaker, the Government subsidises input at the warehouse to the tune of \$1.75 million yearly. And I will recall when this initiative was taken some years ago; it was said by the Opposition that sugar as an entity must be handled by the private sector. Today, the farmers of St. Vincent and the Grenadines have benefited tremendously and are continuing to benefit from this initiative taken by the Government.

So that, Mr. Speaker, the farmers of Green Hill, Trigger Ridge and Largo Heights are no where different to those of Chateaubelair, Vermont, Marriagua, Georgetown or Fancy. I thank you, very much.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Question No... Supplementary?

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary Question.

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Mr. Speaker, is the Honourable Minister indicating that under the circumstances farmers cannot look forward to a better price than the \$120.00 per sack for fertilizer. Is that the indication?

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Senator, I do not know how you arrived at that. But do you want to answer the question?

HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL: Senator, the price of fertilizers are calculated at cost price, so that whatever the cost, I cannot guarantee you whether or not, if the cost would go up or down. I cannot tell you whether or not the price would go up or down.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Question No. 13. Honourable Senator Cummings.

HONOURABLE SENATOR CUMMINGS: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Question No. 13 is for the Honourable Minister of Social Development etcetera.

13. The Honourable Daniel Cummings (Opposition Senator), to ask the Honourable Minister of Social development, Youth Affairs, the Family and Gender Affairs, national mobilization;

Child rights advocates have long pointed to the need for a juvenile facility for minors charged with criminal offences.

Could the Honourable Minister kindly indicate if and when such a facility will be constructed for St. Vincent and the Grenadines?

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Minister for Youth Affairs, Family Gender Affairs, National Mobilisation, Social Development.

HONOURABLE MICHAEL BROWNE: Mr. Speaker, I note in the structure of the question from the Honourable Senator that Child Rights Advocates have long, I repeat long, pointed to the need for a juvenile facility for minors charged with criminal offences. The 'long' suggests Mr. Speaker, that the issue preceded this administration and it begs the question as to why did the previous administration not address this matter fulsomely, given the fact that Child Rights Advocates have 'long' pointed to the need for a juvenile facility.

Mr. Speaker, this administration has been very strong in not only addressing crime and the causes of crime, regardless of the age group but we have attempted to preempt crime and let it be recorded that in 2001 when this administration took office, that the figures we received from the police indicated that reported crimes stood at over 10,000 in our country, under the NDP time. Progressively over the years, 2001, 2002, 2003, right down to now, the statistics have shown a decline to the point where we are just over 6,000; from 10,000, so there has been a progressive decline even though some of the crimes are of such a hideous nature and gets banner headlines in the newspapers that it tends to give a skewed picture as to what is happening with crime in the country.

But, through a multifaceted programme, a people oriented programme, Mr. Speaker, we have been preempting crime and in relation to juvenile offenders, we have a number of programmes addressing juveniles at risk. So, for example, for some time the Ministry of Social Development along with the Ministry of Education, when I was the Minister of Education we had engaged in the process of establishing a what we called a 'Student at Risk Facility', and even though the facility itself had not been set up, we had put into place a series of programmes that addressed juveniles at risk.

So, for example, you have counseling and mediation done for juveniles at risk. Secondly, during our July, August, CAP programme: Children Against Poverty Programme, there is a special programme call Behaviour Modification Programme, targeting primary schools which it covers a period of three weeks focusing on Children with behavioral problems all in an effort to preempt juvenile delinquency and indeed juvenile criminality.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, last year our Ministry in collaboration with the National Commission on the Rights of the Child, with funding from the Social Investment Fund, we commissioned a report on the rehabilitation of street children and following that we have through a consultant developed a pastoral care programme and may I indicate to this Honourable House that indeed we have started work on that programme, starting with Layou, where we had identified 11 children and with the help of the Social Investment Fund a tune of \$44,000 has been allocated to start that process. So we are doing this thing very scientifically. We are doing the research, we are analyzing but when we find the problem, following investigation we implement programmes, all within the context of preempting crime. So we have three examples, Mr. Speaker, of preemption in relation to juveniles who could tend or lean in those directions.

With regard the actual juveniles who run afoul of the law, we have again a multiplicity of programmes through our Ministry and working in conjunction with other Ministries. So for example, a number of them would be placed on bond and order to keep the peace for a specific period of time. Then we have those who are sent to the Liberty Lodge Boys Training Centre, and I should indicate that this year is the 40th Anniversary of the centre and they have a programme which will deal with the history and the actual activities of the Centre.

It is my understanding that the original intent of the Centre was indeed to put juveniles at risk there, but over the years it also accommodated disadvantaged juvenile boys who were not afoul of the law. Now, there are some difficulties which are arising there as a result of that mixture, should we say; and we are addressing it. But the point is the resources are there, in term of trained counselors, physical facilities, programming et cetera, which makes it easy, relatively speaking for us to accommodate some of these youngsters there.

Some of the juveniles who run afoul of the law they are ordered by the Court to attend counseling from a case worker, Family Court Counselor. Indeed, yesterday I was on a panel with one of the Family Court Counselor's Ms. Wyllie, our non governmental organisations services like Marion House. In some cases the Court imposes a curfew on the child. So there are multiplicities of things that we do in relation to the juveniles that run afoul of the law, but we know that it would be useful to have a facility, not only for boys, but for girls.

But, Mr. Speaker, this administration is addressing the issue in a holistic way. We have a raft of legislation under the OECS Family Law and Domestic Violence Reform Project and under it we have four Bills that we expect to come to Parliament this year. Indeed, in the last Throne Speech by the Governor General it said, in the coming year, legislation would be introduced covering a wide field, touching and concerning the following, among other areas: consumer protection, dangerous dogs, illegal profession, biological diversity and the environment, pharmaceuticals, hospital governance, urban development, and let me underline this, for the Senator, family law and domestic violence, which is what I am holding in my hand; the rehabilitation of criminal offenders, the reform of aspects of the criminal law and procedure.

So, we are addressing the question holistically, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members and the model legislation that we have here has a particular one, 'Booklet Three' they call it which deals with child justice and it has in it recommendation for different kinds of facilities, so not just a single facility, a range of facilities, depending on the nature of the offence and I must tell you my staff, went through these booklets recently, every word in them and we are quite impressed with the contents of the legislation but I just want to again emphasize that this administration is approaching this issue scientifically and holistically. I thank the Honourable Senator for his question and if he does not have these I can make these documents available to the Honourable Senator. It would be useful to him also to examine the contents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary question?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: Mr. Speaker, while we recognize the preventative measures and the legislative agenda spoken about, I have not heard a specific answer to my question. Is the government going to build a centre and if so when?

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Member. If and when.

HONOURABLE MICHAEL BROWNE: Well, I thought my answer was self evident, that a facility does exist and if it does exist we may not need to construct one. And indeed the construction is not the only option available, if you have a building that could be acquired or exist then it makes the need for an actual construction unnecessary. But I thought that was covered within the question.

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: We do not have a facility that exists. Liberty Lodge Boys is not for that.

HONOURABLE MICHAEL BROWNE: That is not true.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Question No. 14, Honourable Senator Cummings.

HONOURABLE SENATOR CUMMINGS: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, question No. 14 is to the Honourable Minister of Education.

14. The Honourable Daniel Cummings (Opposition Senator), to ask the Honourable Minister of Education:

As a government engaged in what it terms an "Education Revolution" and which touts itself as champion of the poor:

Would the Government state if any system exists for the identification of any assistance to primary school age children who are unable to go to school because their parents/guardians cannot afford to buy books and provide uniforms, food and transportation monies in order to send them to school?

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Minister for Education.

HONOURABLE GIRLYN MIGUEL: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, this Government is engaged in an education revolution. [Applause] That is a fact from which we cannot run away. And the Government is in fact, the champion of the poor. And this is evidence by its many programmes geared to assisting those persons.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to inform the Honourable Member that this Government ensures that students are identified in the following ways: through the schools, through concerned citizens in communities, through referrals from the Family Court and the Family Affairs Division, through organisations and groups, through the parents themselves

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, after referral an assessment is done of the circumstances and provision is made to provide resources based on need. Further, visits are normally made to the respective schools to ascertain the information given. For meals, arrangements are made with school tuck shops and the Ministry of National Mobilization pays monthly the sums quoted. Within the schools there exists a School Feeding Programme and Mr. Speaker, I must emphasize no one is debarred, even if students are unable to pay the paltry sum of 50 cents a day.

For the purchase of books, book vouchers are provided and the students receive the books from different suppliers. Uniforms are provided for needy students on an annual basis but it is also possible for provision to be made in extenuating circumstances at other times. Transportation is paid to the parents monthly and the parent is expected to pay the given transportation cost.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, reports are made every day and action is taken on an on going basis. I must further add, Mr. Speaker, that these services are also provided for students at the secondary and post secondary levels. At those levels however, there is a book loan scheme for which a contribution of \$50.00 is made in return for the majority of text required. The Ministry of National Mobilization pays for those students who cannot afford. If it is drawn to the attention of Ministry of Education and the Ministry of National Mobilization that funds provided are not well spent. Steps are taken to ensure that the child or children are not disadvantaged. I am obliged, Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, very much. Question No. 15. Honourable Senator Cummings.

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, question No. 15 is for the Honourable Minister of Transport and Works.

15. The Honourable Daniel Cummings (Opposition Senator), to ask the Honourable Minister of Transport and Works:

Over the years, approximately 100 yards of the main road in Buddy Gutter was concreted. Since then, the residents have seen a total deterioration of the dirt road that they must use through sun and rain; in addition, the

road at McIntosh Street, New Montrose has been identified by the public and acknowledged by a Government Minister to be in a state of disrepair for over four (4) years:

- a. Would the Honourable Minister please state when the residents of Buddy Gutter can expect to receive the basic amenity of a paved road in and out of the community;
- b. when will the piece of road at McIntosh Street be repaired?

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Minister of Transport and Works.

HONOURABLE CLAYTON BURGIN: Mr. Speaker, with the development in the area by VINLEC and PETROCARIBE along with a general development plan for the entire area, there would be some adjustment to the road. However, consideration is being given to stabilize.

There is also Mr. Speaker, a proposal to design and build an additional new road from Lowmans Bay on the opposite side by a Great House over the hill into Ottley Hall. The National Properties and Physical Planning have already held their discussions as to the routing. This road would be a by pass to lessen the traffic on the main Leeward Highway, but it is likely to be restricted and it is not intended for use by heavy equipment trucks and trailers.

The McIntosh Street will be repaired as part of the first quarter's asphalt works this year. And that has been presented by the Parliamentary Representative for West Kingstown. That is it, Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: That brings us to the end of question time. I think we will consider suspension for lunch; Honourable Prime Minister.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, we are now twenty to two, perhaps half past three. Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, when we return I would do the Statements. I am obliged, Mr. Speaker.

Accordingly, I beg to move that this Honourable House do stand suspended for luncheon period until 3:30 p.m.

HONOURABLE MICHAEL BROWNE: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion

Question put and agreed to.
House suspended for luncheon period at 1:43 p.m.
House resumed at 3:35 p.m.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Pray be seated.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move under Standing Order 12 (5) that the proceedings of today's sitting be exempted from provisions of Standing Order Hours' of Sitting.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENT BY MINISTERS

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I wish to make two statements one on the recent developments regarding the CL CLICO Financial Group and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the second addressing certain on going economic challenges consequent upon the International Economic Crisis.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has noted the recent developments between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the CL Financial Group. The CL Financial Group is a parent company headquartered in Trinidad and Tobago that provides a wide range of financial services and products in the region including St. Vincent and the Grenadines, through the group holdings, British American Insurance Company, Caribbean Money Market Brokers: CMMB, and CLICO Insurance Company. A number of state owned enterprises, credit unions, private companies, and individuals in St. Vincent and the Grenadines invested significant amount of funds in the aforementioned subsidiaries of CL Financial Group. Accordingly, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is taking swift and decisive measures to monitor the on folding outcomes of the arrangements, between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and CL Financial Group.

Last Friday January 30th, 2009, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago through the Central Bank announced that it had intervened in the operations of CL Financial Limited Group, the stated objectives of the intervention by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago regarded CL Financial are as follows:

1. To stem the increasing serious liquidity pressures facing the financial services companies within the group that is CLICO Insurance Companies, CLICO Investment Bank: CIB, and Caribbean Money Market Brokers Limited: CMMB.
2. To maintain public confidence in these institutions which constitute a significant part of the country's financial services industry; and
3. To ensure stability and integrity of the financial system.

In a statement issued by the Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, on the matter on Friday January 30th, he said the following among other things the Central Bank is very conscious of the contagion risks that financial difficulties in an institution as vast as CL Financial Group could have on the entire financial system of Trinidad and Tobago and indeed in the entire Caribbean region.

For the record, ladies and gentlemen, the CL Financial Group has an imposing presence with potentially systemic consequences for the financial sector and the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and the entire region. For example,

1. The group controls over \$100 billion of assets in at least 28 companies located throughout the region and the world.

2. The Group's financial interests cover several industry sectors including banking and financial services, energy, real estate and manufacturing and distribution. The four largest financial institutions in the group manage asset of over 38 billion, over 25% of the GDP of Trinidad and Tobago.

3. In addition to CLICO among the Group's Holdings is British American Insurance Company Limited which is one of the main insurance companies in the Eastern Caribbean. After intense discussions over the past week the Central Bank, the Ministry of Finance and the representatives of the CL Financial Group have reached an agreement on the strategy to deal with the liquidity challenges of CLICO Investment Bank and CLICO Insurance Company to address the underlying problems that have given rise to the current financial stress.

The Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago went on to say the principal objectives of the strategy are to ensure that resources are available to meet withdrawals of third party CIB depositors and CLICO policyholders to protect the funds of the depositors and policyholders and in doing so maintain confidence in CLICO and reinforce confidence in the financial sectors as a whole. The main elements of the strategy are as follows:-

1. The Central Bank will take control of CIB under Section 44 (d) of the Central Bank Act of Trinidad and Tobago.

2. Early next week all the third party assets and liabilities of the books of CIB and CMMB will be transferred to the state owned First Citizens Bank. These liabilities will be matched by resources from the sales of CIB Holdings of certain high quality assets. The Central Bank will provide short term liquidity as needed to ensure that these liabilities are serviced.

3. Following the execution of these transactions, CLICO Investment Banks, banking license will be revoked.

4. CLICO has a sizeable statutory fund deficit; CL Financial has agreed to divest additional assets to help fund this deficit. The Government has committed to provide any additional funding that is needed by CLICO.

5. The Government will be provided in exchange for collateral and an equity interest in CLICO. It will also act as a catalyst for implementing a change in the current business model and corporate governance structure of CLICO the intention would be to return CLICO to its original moorings.

The Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago further went on to say I would like to emphasize that these considerable steps being taken by the CL Financial Group, the Government and the Central Bank are specifically designed to tell CIB depositors that your funds are safe and to maintain confidence in CLICO which for decades has been the strength of the insurance sector in Trinidad and Tobago and in the region. CLICO is policyholders can be assured that the long term future of CLICO will be guaranteed by the adoption of a more robust and less risky model; because any stress in one corner of the financial system tends to raise concerns throughout the sector. I would also take the opportunity to remind the national community of the tremendous

strength of our financial system which indeed is the envy of the region. Excluding CIB the banking system now boasts of an average capital adequacy level of 18% compared with a recommended minimum of 8% in contrast to the illiquidity of CIB, the rest of the banking system is plagued by excess liquidity. The overall level of non performing loans is an impressive low, 2% and the Banks have more than adequate level of provisions against bad loans.

That is the statement substantially of the Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago on this matter.

Subsequently, on Sunday February 1st, 2009 in a telephone conversation which I had with Honourable Minister of Finance of Trinidad and Tobago, Mrs. Karen Nunez Tesheira, she reiterated the assurances given to investors, depositors and policyholders by the Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago. Specifically, she assured me that those assurances relate not only to investors, depositors and policyholders in Trinidad and Tobago but included those also in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the rest of the Caribbean.

Further on Monday 2nd February in another telephone conversation this time with the Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago himself. He informed me that the Finance Minister Nunez Tesheira had informed him of my inquiries and her assurances, he reconfirmed that the investments of any investor/depositor or policyholder in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in any of the companies of CL Financial Group operating out of Trinidad and Tobago namely CLICO Insurance Company of Trinidad and Tobago, British American Insurance Company, the CLICO Investment Bank and Caribbean Money Market Brokers are safe and sound. He pledged to put this in writing to me. He informed me too that he had given a similar assurance to Sir Dwight Venner the Governor of our Eastern Caribbean Central Bank.

On February 2nd, 2009, the Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago wrote to me on the following and other terms:

“The main objectives of the strategy are to protect third party, that is excluding intra-group liabilities of these companies, the liabilities of CIB will be transferred to First Citizen’s Bank and these would be guaranteed by the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago. CLICO’s and British American’s policies issued in Trinidad and Tobago will be guaranteed by Government.”

Although the policies of the local branch of British American are governed by the laws of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, they are actually issued in Trinidad and Tobago. The Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago has confirmed to me that this is in fact an issuance, from Trinidad and Tobago and thus covered by the guarantee of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Regarding the investments of any investor, depositor or policyholder in CLICO Holdings Barbados Limited, I have been in communication with the Chairman of CLICO Barbados, Mr. Leroy Parris and Prime Minister David Thompson, each of them assured me that the investments of the investors, depositors or policy holders of CLICO Barbados in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the rest of the Eastern Caribbean are safe; indeed separately, both Mr. Parris and Prime Minister Thompson sent me a statement on the matter issued by the Prime Minister on Friday January 30th. In that statement Prime Minister Thompson stated the following among other things:

“Barbadian depositors, investors and holders of insurance policies can therefore be considered safe in the context of our financial sector. Barbados has the reputation of being the third best regulated financial sector in the world. Additionally, we have managed similar financial sector issues in the past extremely well, on no occasions were Barbadians disadvantaged. It is not in the interest of depositors of our country for there to be panic. Such panic would reverberate through our financial systems and compromise our ability to ride out this situation and the global economic challenges. It is in the interest of all Barbadians for calm thinking and normalcy in our financial sector. I assure you that the Government will constantly monitor this situation and will act in a timely manner to protect the financial interest of all Barbadians”

Both Mr. Parris and Prime Minister Thompson assured me that reference to Barbadians in the Prime Minister’s statement refers to depositors, investors and holders of insurance policies of CLICO Barbados in the Eastern Caribbean. In fact, in a letter from Prime Minister Thompson to me dated February 2nd 2009, he stated in part as follows:-

“I thought I should formally let you know what I said at a press briefing with the Governor of our Central Bank and the Supervisor of Insurance on Saturday regarding the situation with CL Financial and its Subsidiary Companies. I am therefore attaching a copy of the statement which sets out our position. My consultations and analysis have been extensive and it is clear that there is an obvious line of demarcation between CLICO Trinidad and Barbados operations. CLICO Barbados is also separately regulated by our Central Bank and the Supervisor of Insurance. You should feel free to have your officials make contact with their counterparts in these organisations to provide further information if necessary. I am acutely conscious of the impact; any instability in the financial markets could have in our economies given the reach of the Barbados operations of CLICO into our regional neighbours in the Eastern Caribbean. I therefore stand ready to take any action necessary to ensure the strength and security of our financial system individually and collectively”.

That was the statement and letter to me by the Prime Minister of Barbados.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I have also seen written assurances from the state-owned Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, First Citizens Bank, and CMMB about the safety of clients’ investment with them.

In the Eastern Caribbean, Sir Dwight Venner and I have been in regular communication on this subject matter over the weekend, this last weekend, yesterday and today. As the Chairman of the joint OECS ECCB task force and as the most senior Minister of Finance currently serving on the Monetary Council of the ECCB I have a special responsibility to be working closely with the Governor in addition to my obligations as Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Yesterday I have been in telephone contact with several Ministers of finance and Heads of Government of the OECS ECCB countries on this issue.

This morning an important video conference between the Governor and Members of the Monetary Council of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank was held to coordinate our sub-regional position. A statement was issued from this meeting of the Monetary Council today, that is the meeting I left to attend Parliament this morning, we did it by video conference.

The full text of this meeting is as follows;

“At a special meeting of the ECCB Monetary Council held on February 3rd, 2009 Members met to discuss the impact of recent developments with respect to the CL Financial Group, possible implications for the ECCU and action which may be required. The Council noted the media releases by the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Central Bank of Barbados and the proposed strategies for ensuring the continued stability and integrity of the financial systems. The Council also noted the consultations which had taken place between the Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and the relevant parties in Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados, as well as the consultations between individual members of council and these parties. The Council noted the guarantees given by the relevant authorities with respect to depositors, policyholders and investors in CLICO and CLICO related companies.

The Council agreed that there was a need for the Member countries of the currency union to collectively address the matter with the authorities of Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados. Accordingly, Council agreed to be undertaken by the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and the Chairman of the OECS transition taskforce Dr the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves to continue the collaboration with all relevant parties on behalf of the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union to ensure appropriate coverage for all exposed entities. Council also agreed to accelerate the completion and enactment of legislation to govern the regulation of the non-bank financial sector including Money Services, Insurance Companies, Cooperative Societies and Building Societies. Council members would wish to assure all institutions and the public in the Currency Union that their interests are being protected. The council will next meet at its regularly scheduled meeting on February 13th at which the situation would be further addressed”.

The Governor of the Central Bank, our Central Bank had earlier sent to all Members of the Monetary Council and financial secretaries in ECCU member states, the following communications dated February 2nd, 2009:-

“I have been in touch with the Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, it was assured me that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Central Bank have guaranteed the obligations of CLICO Trinidad and Tobago, CMMB Trinidad and Tobago and CIB Trinidad and Tobago in the Currency Union. I would be grateful if as a matter of urgency that the total exposure of your country to all the affiliates of CLICO, be ascertain and send to the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank as soon as possible. The Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago has agreed with me that we will collaborate and verify these exposures for further action if necessary”.

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines the National Insurance Services (NIS), the National Commercial Bank (NCB) have investment in the CLICO Group of Companies, the NIS, NCB, VINLEC and a few other state enterprises hold their pension monies with CLICO. Credit Unions, Private Companies and individuals have invested significantly in the CLICO group. The main entities of the CLICO group of direct relevance to St. Vincent and the Grenadines are British American Insurance Companies, CLICO Barbados and CLICO Trinidad and Tobago. Most of the investments are in British American and CLICO Barbados, although the NIS holds \$38.6 million

Eastern Caribbean or 11.36% of its total investments in CLICO group in Trinidad mainly in annuities. Another 6.8% of the NIS's total investment of EC\$23 million is in CLICO Barbados, the NCB holds \$13.3 million in investments in the Trinidad group. The NIS and NCB investments are mainly of a short to medium term nature, several of the deposits are maturing this year and others between 2010 and May 2012.

The total exposure of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is far greater than the holdings of the State Enterprises, Credit Unions, Private Companies and individuals hold considerable sums in the aggregate. We are at the moment finalising the numbers.

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is satisfied that is to say the numbers from the Credit Unions, Private Companies and individuals, because the Regulators have the numbers, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is satisfied that these investments are safe and sound and there is no need to panic. We are comforted by the assurances and commitments of the Governments of Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados and all the other factual circumstances surrounding the CL Financial Group and its subsidiaries.

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines commends the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for its swift and decisive action in this matter. We commend too the Government of Barbados on its solemn assurances and quick public responses. We shall continue to monitor the situation closely, nationally and through the coordinated mechanism of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank. We are confident in meeting all the challenges successfully. I am obliged, Mr. Speaker.

I shall make a copy of this statement Mr. Speaker, available to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition whom today when I arrived at the House of Assembly; I had called the Governor of the Central Bank Mr. Ewarth Williams and let him speak to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to provide him with the similar assurances which I am sure he gave to him in relation to the matters.

Mr. Speaker, I want to address the issue of the ongoing socio-economic challenges consequent upon the International Economic Crisis. Mr. Speaker, the basis for my Government's approach to the ongoing socio-economic challenges facing St. Vincent and the Grenadines was outlined in my 2009 Budget Speech delivered on the 1st December, 2008. Mr. Speaker, I do not need today to repeat what I said in that speech, the central issues in the introduction where I dealt with these questions, but I have them detailed for easy reminder to members of the media when I circulate the statement to them.

Mr. Speaker, in that statement among other things, we identified the continuation of the countercyclical fiscal policy, maintenance of all the macro-fundamentals and to have a countercyclical fiscal policy which was at once prudent and enterprising. In that introductory section of my speech I said that central to the bundle of creative initiatives and focus continuity are the following and I listed 14 major public policies upon which we will be going forward in this very challenging year.

So, Mr. Speaker, as we began the New Year it became necessary within the carrying out of our work to do certain things within the broad framework which we have devised. So I want to address first the institutional arrangements for the task ahead. In tackling the task ahead my Government has been engaged in further

strengthening its institutional arrangements locally and its linkages regionally and internationally. Locally we have embarked on the following:-

1. I addressed the nation on January 12th, 2009 and accordingly outlined the immediate task ahead and I summoned our people to work harder and smarter in these more challenging times. This speech was broadcast live on radio and published in full in the Searchlight Newspaper, it was broadcast on television, it sharpen the public discussion on our collective work ahead.

2. At our first Cabinet meeting for 2009 on January 7th, we mapped the practical way forward at each subsequent Cabinet meeting, we assess the progress of our ongoing plans and work

3. I have led consultations with critical stakeholders including the Hoteliers and others in the Tourism Sector. The principals of the Mustique Company and the Canouan Developers, the air transport operators, LIAT and SVG Air. The stakeholders in Agriculture including WINFA and SVG Producers, the Permanent Secretaries and Chief Officers of Public Enterprises and a few of the Public Enterprises individually. Arising out of each of these encounters progress was made in carrying out our immediate and strategic task.

4. Cabinet has established two important committees which will begin work shortly, namely;

(a) a cabinet committee on public works shared by the Deputy Prime Minister and including the current Minister of Works, Clayton Burgin, the pass Minister of Works Julian Francis and relevant public officials. Vital work is to be done by and through the Ministries of Works and Agriculture and Fisheries thus two bodies, this one (a) and

(b) a standing committee on Agriculture chaired by the Minister of Agriculture and involving all the relevant stakeholders including those in WINFA, SVG Producers and others including persons in fishing.

5. The Institutional arrangements in the Ministry of Tourism have been strengthened with the start up from January 1st, 2009 of the National Tourism Authority

6. The institutional arrangements in the Ministry of Education have been strengthened through several initiatives including the start up of the integrated body of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College.

Mr. Speaker, the continuation of the Education Revolution is even more vital in this period.

7. The revitalization of the Police oversight body with three members, Reverend Victor Job as Chairman and two other members, Mr. Charles James, a former Police Officer and the experienced lawyer Mr. Ronald Jack, again addressing certain issues relating to Law and Order.

8. The restructuring of the Banana Industry for the better through the Banana Industry Bill which is scheduled for debate in Parliament today.

9. The strengthening of the regulation of building societies by replacing the Registrar of the High Court as regulator by the office of the Director of Finance and Planning in which is lodged a single regulatory unit for non-banking financial institutions.

Mr. Speaker this afternoon we will debate that particular amendment.

10. A Cabinet retreat will take place on Thursday February 5th to as to enhance the quality and timely delivery of the work of the Cabinet and on Monday 9th an all day retreat of the vital state-owned enterprise National Properties will occur. National Properties have an important role to play in this period.

Regionally my Government has been engaged in strengthening our works on the immediate and strategic task through the following among other things;

1. Participation in the Cuba CARICOM summit on December 10th last year in which measures to address the International Economic Crisis were discussed and Cuba CARICOM relations fortified.

2. Participation in the Latin American Caribbean summit in Brazil on December 18th and 19th last year. Practical steps to deepen regional integration were adopted

3. Participation in the OECS Eastern Caribbean Central Bank joint meeting in St. Kitts on January 15th and 16th this year. Short term and medium term measures were adopted in response to the socio-economic fall out of the International Crisis. I was elected as Chairman of the Task Force to coordinate the sub-regional response, other members of the Task Force are the Grenadian Prime Minister Tillman Thomas, he is the current Chairman of the OECS, Antigua Minister of Finance, Dr. Errol Cort the current chairman of the Monetary Council of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, the Governor of the Central Bank Sir Dwight Vennor and the Director General of the OECS, Dr. Len Ishmael

4. Participation in the meeting of the CARICOM Council of Ministers of Finance and Planning in Barbados on January 29th, this meeting address CARICOM response to the crisis. A task force under Chairmanship of the Caribbean Development Bank has been set up to report by the end of March 2009, a full package of regional measures in addition to those initiated nationally. St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a member of the Task Force representing the less developed countries of CARICOM.

5. Other regional engagements through CARICOM, OECS and the ECCB have been taking place.

6. My Government has met with representatives of PDVSA, the state owned oil company out of Venezuela in the strengthening of Petro-Caribe. Internationally our diplomatic representative overseas and members of Cabinet has been focusing on lifting our work internationally in these more challenging times several initiatives are being taken.

ONGOING WORK

The Estimates and Budget for 2009 were fashioned in the crucible of the ongoing challenges arising from the regional and international situation. Thus the Estimates and the fiscal measures therein constitute the fulcrum around which our work for 2009 revolves. We are busily sourcing all grant monies, loans and technical assistance identified in the Budget. Similarly we are collecting the various items of local revenue. It is too early to say whether we are on target to meet our local revenue estimates, hitherto our estimates have been met.

At the same time the ongoing, recurrent and capital works of the Government is continuing apace. Given fact that events in the unfolding International Economic Crisis are moving swiftly and in some cases unexpectedly, our plans are under constant review and adjustments or shifts are accordingly being made. Since January 2009 my Government has undertaken additional initiative to meet the challenges including;

(a) **Tourism:**

And I believe the Honourable Minister of Tourism would have answered some of this in a question this morning, I was not here but if he did not I would repeat them for the purposes, Mr. Speaker, of emphasis and further clarities.

1. More intense and aggressively focus marketing
2. Coordinating with hoteliers, special packages for visitors
3. Elaborating enhance training opportunities in the Tourism Sector, it is a time when in some cases where two weeks on two weeks off, we can occupy people's attention with training.
4. Pushing faster than ever the development of the tourism product including tourism sites
5. The provision by the Government of two important measures of relieve for tourism operators
 - a. From February to at least October 31st, 2009, electricity rates would be effectively reduced by 14% from commercial rates to domestic.
 - b. The reduction of cooperate taxes on the Tourism Sector, hotels, apartments, tow operators, yachting operators, guest houses from 30% to 20%.

These Mr. Speaker would provide some relieve for the people in the tourism business.

6. Actively and vigorously pursuing work in every tourism segment through the tourism authority, the Ministry of Tourism and Coordination regionally

7. Push for the implementation of the planned private sector tourism investments of which there are several and I have already met with persons who have been engaged in these investments in the first few weeks of this year.

8. Enhance flights to and from St. Vincent and the Grenadines and within St. Vincent and the Grenadines through LIAT flights to Canouan from Barbados and Puerto Rico and the connecting use of four new twin otters, the 19 seaters operated by SVG Air.

Mr. Speaker, I explain here that actually on March 3rd there will be an inaugural flight of LIAT to Canouan and we are hoping that later this month there has been an ordering of the relevant lights so that we can put the lights at the Bequia Airport because what we intend to do, in order to facilitate the airlift to Canouan is to have persons who would be coming on say to Bequia or even to St. Vincent, mainland St. Vincent but specifically to Bequia to make the connections with one or more of the four twin otters, three purchased and one leased by the Mustique Company and operated by SVG Air, each of them of course 19 seaters. So I think the Honourable Member for the Northern Grenadines would be quite pleased about this, naturally the Southern too and the whole of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. Speaker,

(b) Agriculture and Fisheries

1. The establishment of the Standing Committee on agriculture and fisheries and working closer with the relevant stakeholders

2. Restructuring the Banana Industry for the better

3. Ordering fertilizer on a timely basis and distributing and selling them expeditiously.

4. Starting up the operations of the Owia Fishes Complex by April 2009 and uplift the fisheries sector generally.

5. Focus implementation of the elements in the National Food Production Plan.

6. Operationalise the Land Bank Programme.

7. Push for the timely implementation of the main result indicators in the 2009 Estimates for Agriculture.

(c) Construction Energy in Industry

Construction is a vital sector in the transitioning of a goods based economy to a service based one, in these more challenging times it is more important thus the many sided focus including regional coordination to lift the

construction sector more markedly. The Cabinet Sub-committee and public works is central to driving this focus so too with the Roads, Buildings and General Services Authority when it becomes operational on July 1st, 2009.

Regarding the energy sector my Government is pushing for greater efficiencies in VINLEC and the diversification of the energy base towards wind, solar and geothermal energy. Our aim in the medium term is to lay the ground work to make us the first green country in the not too distant future. Emphasis is being placed too by my Government in the light manufacturing sector, agro-processing and information technology industries. The Ministry of Technology and Industry (NIPI) the centre for Enterprise Development and the National Commercial Bank are at the heart of this thrust in conjunction with the enterprising private entrepreneurs in these fields.

We continue too to pursue work in the International Financial Services Sector as an important area of economic activity.

(d) Safety Nets

In my 2009 Budget Address, I identify the series of Safety Net measures available from the Central Government. Among these I listed 20 which amount to some \$40 million for the financial year 2009. This is in addition to the substantial contributory and non-contributory pensions and other payments through the NIS. The lost of jobs by approximately 100 persons since the start of the year has cause my Government to elaborate in conjunction with the NIS for the Safety Nets supports, these will be announced shortly.

(e) People's Involvement

In these more challenging times our people must work harder and smarter, be more productive and discipline, be more caring, loving, peaceful and united, we have it in us to triumph yet again over adversity and make even better lives for ourselves as a whole and individually. Our Public Sector must be more efficient in its delivery of goods and services, we have improved over recent years but much better can still be done. Unless each person in St. Vincent and the Grenadines work harder and smarter than ever, we would not achieve the best possible results.

Mr. Speaker, I simply want additionally to finalise our focused approach and to take the country along with us. I want to give to the Parliament and to the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines what is the state of the fiscal operations of the Government for St. Vincent and the Grenadines at the end of 2008. When we did the Budget we were able to talk what was happening earlier, we were not able to go to the end of December. I want to give the total picture now, Mr. Speaker, so that we know where we are.

Total revenue on Grants in 2008 increased by 13%, from \$464.3 million in 2007 to \$524.9 million in 2008, of this sum of total revenue on Grants, the Current Revenue itself increases by 11.6%, from \$433.4 million to \$483.6 million.

Mr. Speaker, the Capital Revenue portion of total revenue on Grants increased by 33.4%, from \$30.97 million to \$41.3 million. The total expenditure increased by 8.4%, from \$509.79 million to \$552.69 million. Of the total

expenditure in 2008 \$552.69, 2007 \$509.79 of that total sum Mr. Speaker, recurrent expenditure increased by 13.9%, from \$378.3 million to \$430.8 million. I should point out Mr. Speaker, that personal emoluments in 2008 increased by 10.1%, from \$168.6 million to \$185.7 million, almost \$18 million, that itself Mr. Speaker; we had an increase from 2006 through 2007, from \$152.5 to \$168.6 an increase of \$16 million. In other words, between 2006 to 2007 the emoluments bill increase by \$16 million and 2007 to 2008 by \$18 million, substantial increases.

The Capital Expenditure last year declined marginally from \$131.5 million to \$121.9 million which is still a pretty good performance.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members the current balance decline slightly, 4.2% decline from a current balance, we have a current surplus of \$52.7 million, in 2007 it was \$55.06 million but the overall balance, the deficit overall declined from \$45.5 million in 2007 to \$27.8 million in 2008, a decline of 38.9% which is quite commendable.

Mr. Speaker, that is the platform as we ended the year 2008 to meet our challenges as set out in the Estimates and all the other institutional arrangements, which we have put in place so far this month and the other specific initiatives. I want to assure the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines that the Government and I personally, we are doing all that we can conceivable do to get things stabilize properly, to have everything going forward, we are making progress and Mr. Speaker, I tell you we have to work harder and we have to work smarter. Without wishing to 'be immodest' I was up this morning at 1:30 a.m. and I have not gone back to sleep since 1:30 a.m. We have to work harder, we have to work smarter.

This is no time for any slackness, everybody has to really do his or her best, that is in the nature of what we are involved in. We look at the United States of American, we see the challenges which they are facing and I hope that the public also notices that President Obama who has articulated a fine doctrine of together now, he has a splendid doctrine, he has called all the Republicans to the White House, he has wined and dined them, he has charmed them on Capital Hill but when the stimulus package was put into the House of Representatives not one single Republican voted. I hope we do not have that kind of a response to together now in St. Vincent and the Grenadines as we go forward. I am obliged Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Wait just a minute, Senator you where asking something?

[Inaudible]

DR THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, I would have the copies, if not today certainly tomorrow, there are some editorial corrections as you can imagine. These documents have been prepared as you see, even the ones which has been incorporating the statements from the Governor of the Central Bank, the Monetary Council which we just held this morning, a letter which I have just received from the Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, so it meant that when other persons had lunch I had to be working it and have my staff do it and as you would imagine there are some typographical errors which I would like to correct for you. That is how we have to work, Senator, that is how we have to work, it is the

nature of the business, if you are not prepared to work like that, you cannot do the job, all of us in this Honourable House.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(1) Building Society's Amendment Bill 2009

DR THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSLAVES: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that this should be a particularly long Bill, and we can then get to the Banana Industry Bill because I see members of WINFA Fair Trade: members of the Banana Producing Community.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I beg to move a Bill for an act to amend the Building Society's act. This Bill seeks to amend the Building Society's Act to vest administrative and regulatory functions with respect to Building Societies in the Minister responsible for Finance to repeal authority of the Registrar and establish in place the Director General Finance and Planning as authority charged with the responsibility for Building Societies. I beg to move the first reading of this Bill.

HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

DR THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I beg to move under Standing Order 48 (2) that this Bill be taken through all its stages of today's sitting and passed.

HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

DR THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I beg to move that a Bill for an act to amend the Building Society's Act be read a second time.

HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put and agreed to Bill read a second time.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Debate on the Bill.

DR THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, as I indicated in my statement on the issues arising from the CLICO matter and as I emphasized the decision repeated today by the Monetary Council of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank that we need to strengthen our regulation of financial institutions.

In this country Mr. Speaker, the banks are well regulated through a modern uniformed Banking Act and the oversight authority of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank. The insurance companies in St. Vincent and the Grenadines are also well regulated through a modern insurance act which we passed in our first term; we could not wait on some other countries in the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union because our insurance act was outmoded, so we proceeded ahead. Now there is a uniform Insurance Companies Act fashioned through the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union. We would bring that Act sometime to this Honourable House, there are some relatively minor changes to be made to the one which we passed in the first term so that we can have it uniformly across the sub-region, we will simply bring it in and essentially repeal the one which we passed which is a sound Act but for the sake of uniformity we would bring it to this Honourable House because we have to address these questions in an integrated sense across the region.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the International Finances Services Sector is well regulated, as Honourable Members would know, when we came to office we met two 'black-list' one by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) which had identified St. Vincent and the Grenadines under the previous administration as a locale for money laundering and which had inadequate supervisory powers.

We worked with the FATF Mr. Speaker, and we put a Bill in place to deal with money laundering and proceed of crime, November 2001. In 2002 we set up the Financial Intelligent Unit, incidentally our FIU has the reputation as being the best FIU anywhere in the Caribbean, [Applause] and I have to give lots of recommendations to Mrs. Sharda Bollers who was the first CEO and now Grenville Williams, their hard working staff, good pieces of legislation and of course Mr. Speaker, there is a political will to deal with the issue of money laundering and the proceeds of crime. And as is well known, this Prime Minister has been subjected to all sorts of abuse and even physical threats from those who are engaged in money laundering and the proceeds of crime and those who are connected to them.

Mr. Speaker, we are the first country in the OECS to pass the Money Services Bill, to regulate Western Union and such enterprises of that kind which can be a conduit for the proceeds of crime and money laundering activity, I am not saying that they are but they can be and that is why we had to regulate them and our legislation is being looked at as a model in that regard.

And Mr. Speaker, we have set up IFSA with the whole menu of laws to address issues arising from the 40 recommendations of the FATF and we sort to address though not as robustly as they would have wished us to, issues relating to St. Vincent and the Grenadines as being a harmful tax regime.

So, Mr. Speaker, the areas in which we have difficulties with regulation are in the non banking financial institutions outside of insurance and money services that is to say Building Societies, Credit Unions and even Friendly Societies because there are some Friendly Societies which are now multi-million dollar operations, the Credit Unions are multi-million dollar operations and the main Building Society, in fact I think I can speak of it as the only one the building and Loan Association is a multi-million dollar operation. When the Building Societies Legislation was put in place in No.9 of 1941 and when indeed the legislation in relation to Friendly Societies was put in place, I think is 1859, though we have modernized our cooperative legislation the fact remains that the Cooperatives Division which does the supervision of Credit Unions simply does not possess the capacity to regulate these multi-million dollar operations.

Mr. Speaker, no one is saying that any of these institutions is engaged in activities which may be thought to be wrong or undesirable, not at all. The fact is this that the persons who belong to them must be sure that the state is putting regulation in place to protect them, in the case of the Hindu credit union in Trinidad and Tobago, a TT \$100 million, a hundred million dollar credit union collapsed and left its members holding the bag, so we are going to move for better regulations of the Credit Unions and also of Friendly Societies, but today the object of this piece of legislation is to address Building Societies.

The Building Societies Act of 1941 was amended 8 times between 1947 and 1988, but there was no amendment between 1947 and 1978 and in any event they were of a minor kind. The Registrar of the High Court under the 1941 legislation is the regulator, the Registrar of the High Court with great respect for registrars skilled in law, it has not been known that they are skilled in finance and regulatory skills, indeed the regulation therefore is of a very formal kind, not to do the kind of probing regulation required to protect investors monies. We just heard in Trinidad and Tobago, the Governor of the Central Bank complaining that though he was handed the authority in 2004 to regulate insurance companies he did not have the authority to prevent interparty transactions between all the various subsidiaries of CLICO, he did not have the authority to deal with cross-border transactions for the insurance companies in the way in which it was desirable for him so to have. So, similarly here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines with the Building Societies we need to have it better regulated and I must say that the leadership of the Building and Loan Association welcomes the enhanced regulatory authority at least the capacity.

And Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is that in the Ministry of Finance we are having a single regulatory unit, as is known already, the Registrar of insurance is lodged within the Ministry of Finance and there is a division in the Ministry of Finance which deals with the regulation of insurance companies. We want a single regulatory unit to deal with insurances, we want them to deal with Building Societies, and we want to deal with Credit Unions and certainly with the big Friendly Societies. We have to take a policy decision as to whether we would put IFSA the International Financial Services Authority which is a regulatory authority for International Financial Services, within the single regulatory unit and that is one recommendation made by CARTAC, Caribbean Technical Assistance Centre and we are working with them on a particular model and there are different views at the moment as to how the actual model is to be elaborated, whether we should include IFSA in it or not. Obviously, if we include IFSA you would have to have a legislative reengineering and IFSA would be in a sense one division of this single regulatory unit by whatever name it is called. But we have an immediate need to address Building Societies, Credit Unions and the big Friendly Societies and today as I have said is the day for us to address Building Societies.

Mr. Speaker, having outlined the frame of the Bill and what is the public policy, the Bill is now easier to understand. In section 2 we are deleting the definition of the *'Registrar'* from the Principal Act and by inserting the definition in the appropriate alphabetical position *'Authority'* which means the Director General of Finance and Planning.

Clause 3, Section 30 of the Principal Act is amended by deleting the word *'Registrar'* and substituting the words *'Registrar of the High Court'*, the reason why we doing that is that once you delete the definition you have to put specifically what the Registrar means in the body of the text itself.

Clause 4 the Principal Act is amended by deleting the word, *'Governor General'* and substituting the words *'Minister responsible for Finance'*, so that the authority can be appropriately lodged.

Clause 5, there are some small amendments there deleting *'Registrar'* and *'Registrar of Building Societies'* wherever they occur and put the word *'Authority'*. And there is a consequential amendment which said:

“A reference in any statute to the registrar in relation to building societies shall unless a different intension appears be read and constructed in respect of anytime or period on or after the commencement of this act as if it were a reference to the authority”.

So, if there is any legislation anywhere that would do an umbrella amendment and Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, it would be noted that this Act would have a retrospective effect because we would wish the Act to come into focus on the first day of January and retrospective legislation is of course not prohibited by the Constitution and here is where we are certainly not in these circumstances, and here is where we are Mr. Speaker, with this Bill, a straight forward Bill but an important one and in this particular climate, I think that the investors in building societies would be very with the decisions which we are taking here today in this Parliament. I am obliged. [Applause]

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Mr. Speaker, indeed this is a relatively simple but important piece of legislation because it seeks to ensure that there is greater supervision in the non-bank financial sector or a particular subset of the non-bank financial sector and therefore, as indicated earlier it raises the question of the other non-bank financial institutions operating here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

So, I have no difficulty Mr. Speaker, with the changes that are being proposed in this particular piece of legislation. There are those who would say that in the current climate with CLICO financial collapse in major capitals in the United States, Britain, Europe and other parts of the world that now is the appropriate time for Governments to bring more pressure for regulation and in a way one would find difficulty arguing with that, but at the same time Mr. Speaker, there are those including those in the Credit Union Sector who will feel that the very nature of the operations will change in a way which removes certain levels of independence.

And therefore, Mr. Speaker, we are in a situation in which we will have to make judgments in that regard because I do not think we can afford the collapse of multi-million dollar institutions which some years ago dealt with thousands and hundreds of thousands of dollars, and there is a question of extreme importance and will continue to be with us for some time. Some years ago I had occasion to have a discussion with the current Governor of our Central Bank, East Caribbean Central Bank on this whole question of how far one goes in terms of regulation of the work of non-bank financial institutions and particularly Credit Unions and at that time the Central Bank was supervising 47 commercial banks, I did not feel they had the capacity to take on the supervisory role in relation to Credit Unions. I suspect that as we move in that direction that there will be need to strengthen further the capacity of the Central Bank and Ministries of Finance in dealing with some of these matters. But it is something that we cannot avoid and particularly in relation to the Credit Unions I think there is

going to be need, Mr. Speaker, to have very open consultations and discussions with that subsector of our financial architecture.

Our economy dependant as it is increasingly on services, as you know services now represents some 70 or 71% of our economy is now subject even more so to what is happening in the world around us and it behooves us therefore to put ourselves in a position that we can effectively provide the necessary levels of supervision. While it is true that Trinidad and Tobago because of its own wealth is able to come up with the money to provide guarantees for policyholders and depositors in the CLICO situation which we discussed earlier, not many countries are in that position. Indeed, I think the burden on Trinidad and Tobago is greater than we think in many ways because we must recall that their last budget was prepared on the basis of an oil price of US\$70 per barrel and it is far below that now. And that Government has had occasion to cut substantial amounts from their capital budget for the year 2009, put aside projects that they wanted to do in order to be able to maintain some fiscal stability, having done that, because they are going to get much less revenues, they in fact put aside billions of dollars of capital projects. Having done that to try and rectify the situation they now find themselves dealing with the CLICO situation, which in itself and I notice from their release which in itself would cost billion of dollars, and I do not believe that the entire amount has been fully calculated because its a lot of work that the Central Bank has to do in that regard, but it is vitally important that confidence in the financial institutions is maintained.

It is vitally important that in the execution of the activities that there is some institutions which have a role in regulating, or you may even call it supervising in some instances, it is vitally important that that be the case because many other countries will not be able to do what the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has done and I congratulate them for that. I would not like to think of what the situation in St. Vincent and the Grenadines would be today if the Government of Trinidad and Tobago had not come forward, not only in relation to CLICO but also British America, we would have been in bare pain in this country today and panic had it not been for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Of course that Government has its self interest in this regard because you heard quoted from the Governor of the Central Bank's letter that the 4 major companies in that group control assets of \$38 billion and in fact, represent more than 25% of the Gross Domestic Product of Trinidad and Tobago.

You are not in the position to take that option, the economy of Trinidad and Tobago would go into a slide and therefore, they have that self interest that must be looked after, but they have extended it to the extent that those operations like British American which are owned on the Trinidad end of CLICO are also going to have the guarantees so that our people here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines who are or could have been affected in term of lost of deposits are now in a position to breathe a bit easier because there are guarantees.

I think it is unfortunate that the Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago yesterday did not settle the matter in one day, but I am assuming that very soon the matter would be settled so the necessary legislation would be in place for the Central Bank to carry out its work.

So, I look at the whole question of regulation Mr. Speaker, in that general context, none of us know whether there are any other financial institutions in our region, maybe not as large as CLICO that could find themselves in a difficult position. As you know in the United States some were left to fall and others were helped but given

the amount that Trinidad and Tobago has had to deal with I only hope that there are no more linking in the background and certainly not of anywhere near the size of CLICO with assets of over US\$100 billion.

I know that the Central Bank has its work cut out for it because they have to find ways and they have to take strategic assets of CLICO for the security, they would have to own a number of these assets in order to be able to remain in business and I really want to say thanks to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for what they have done in what I consider to be difficult circumstances, not only internationally and regionally but in Trinidad and Tobago itself and for that they must be complimented.

So Mr. Speaker, yesterday before the assurances were given and I thought of the number of persons who would have had deposits in places like British America, people would have put their gratuity there, people would have set aside various sums that they have earned over the years to look after themselves in retirement, when I thought of all that and at CLICO itself, I really was afraid because it could easily have gone into a situation of total panic and that would have done great damage to the financial sector of the region, it would have done great damage to us here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

In that context Mr. Speaker, I therefore support the measures included in the Building Societies Bill that is before this Honourable House. Much obliged.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Further debate on the Bill. No further debate, Honourable Prime Minister.

DR THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for his support on this piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to say one or two things in agreement with some of the comments which he made and to elaborate a few on my own very briefly. I want to say first Mr. Speaker, that St. Vincent and the Grenadines is the only country in CARICOM where the Prime Minister called the Leader of the Opposition, discussed with him the issue of CLICO and shared the information with him, this is the only country [Applause] because I know that it is so easy on these matters for politics to be played and I want to make sure that I put out the position of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines with clarity and to outline all the facts to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. Indeed the statement which I made today I gave him a précis of it in a long telephone conversation yesterday.

Further, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier I wanted him to speak also to the Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, so that he could hear first hand the assurances of the Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago and that is why I had my staff make the call as I was coming to Parliament so I could hand to him the cell phone, because I spoke to my friend Ewart Williams very briefly here at the House and let the Honourable Leader of the Opposition speak longer with him because I have had several conversations with him before.

Mr. Speaker, this is very important on an issue of Governance. In Trinidad and Tobago unfortunately the expedition with which the Government acted, the Minister of Finance, the Governor of the Central Bank and the Prime Minister and with the Chairman of CL Financial Holdings we did not see that level of response yesterday

in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. The matter which dragged into all sorts of petty political problems they will get finally to the issue of providing the special majority required for the passing of the amendment of the Central Bank Act and also the Insurance Act.

It was so easy to hear how politicians from the Oppositions were going to take a matter like this to throw dirt, they accused Ewart Williams, a distinguished international public servant, a man of impeccable integrity of having used insider trading to cash in a deposit he had at CIB and they want to bring him to account. The simple fact was as he stated it, he had a deposit which had arrived at maturity and had indicated to them since before December, when it was maturing in December, that he was not going to roll over that deposit any longer, he wanted to give it as a gift to his grandson for his educational fund, an insider trading they called it, trying to throw smoke in people's eyes. I mean what are we coming to in this Caribbean, we have a serious business like this and that is where we have reached, we really got to take a stock of ourselves. I mean there is time for robust politicking and time for the use of pious and all sorts of accusations on a political rostrum as part of the lively cut and thrust of Caribbean politics, but surely we have reached the level of maturity that we must know when to say 'no that is not where we will go'; and the electorate must say 'no that is not where we go', with salacious gossip, with innuendos, with falsehoods, with deformation; no, robust language one can understand in the cut and thrust but there are limits. Competitive politics will give for certain cut and thrust and robustness of language but surely it must be within the context of respect and certainly no falsehoods. They have made an accusation also against the Minister of Finance, a woman who comes from an impeccable family, it is real all unfortunate and in the case of Trinidad and Tobago fortunately we do not have that problem here though people try to bring it here obliquely through the backdoor the issue of race and ethnicity.

They said that Patrick Manning did not help the Hindu Credit Union because it is an Indian organisation, but in the same breath they were saying that it is the Government that engineered this problem for CLICO because the head of CLICO is a UNC man, an Opposition man; and that the National Gas Board had gone for \$250 million deposit which they had at CIB. You know the truth of the matter the people had only gotten \$6 or \$8 million and that once you are doing it for them you have to do it for the Hindu Credit Union. Ethnicity and race and demagoguery, now, we really have to go beyond that because I was commenting Mr. Speaker, how better our political systems are to deal with emergencies and challenges than the United States of America because look at the swiftness with which the Government of Trinidad and Tobago dealt with this matter, compared to the way in which President George Bush and his Treasury Secretary allowed Lehman's Brothers to fail, dithered and let it fail and went with AIG the insurance giant in drips and drabs that created such consternation and panic throughout the world from which we are still feeling the profound reverberations.

But that was not the case in Trinidad and Tobago, swiftness, certainty, fine public servant Ewart Williams, sensible political leadership and a political system which would facilitate that, only to see the bickering emerge in the Parliament. But it is not as bad of course as in the US system where President George Bush had to go to the Congress limping along, it is true by then he had been a lame duck President, but the system in the US will ring you out. President Obama is only this far with his stimulus package because he decided after he was elected in the first Tuesday in November to set to work immediately on this package and do his consultations; so when he arrived in office he was firing on all cylinders and still everybody now wants to delay him, the Republicans rejecting together now, to such an extent that President Obama a relatively mild mannered gentleman had to tell them at the White House, "Listen guys remember I won". Elections have consequences

you know, there are some people who have a cockeyed view of democracy that the policies which are defeated are the ones which must be implemented, and the individuals who have been tried and failed, we must rethread them somehow and bring them back and if you do not bring them back it is victimization or a winner takes all or something like that. Surely there has to be a sense of balance about these things and President Obama is learning, he is learning what is happening and I am satisfied that in dealing with these matters our political system is of a much better kind or parliamentary democracy as distinct from an executive presidency.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we are seeking to fine-tune our parliamentary democracy through constitutional reform and in that regard I again early in this New Year invite the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to rejoin the process because all these things are connected, all these things are connected, you cannot [Interjection] yes but that is why I say I wanted to comment because the Leader of the Opposition correctly carried the debate there and I want simply to commend him for taking the debate there but to illuminate certain dark corners, which were left without the searchlight and that is what I think we have to do in this small country, which is a village really, some modern independent nation state but it is 105,000 people, 110,000 people. I mean just think of this, Manchester United Football Ground can accommodate 100,000 people, they can accommodate all the adults in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and room would still left because you cannot take the little babies and the little children, they would get crushed in the football. That is what we are and some of the phantom battles which we are waging and when we come to the Banana Bill we are waging so many phantom battles on this one. Really we are in a boat where all of us have to work together and to put aside personal and institutional vanities.

So, Mr. Speaker, the governance issue is critical here and I want the Press to say it and broadcast this throughout the whole of the Caribbean, throughout the whole world that on the CLICO issue, St. Vincent and the Grenadines is the only country in which the Leader of the Government, the Prime Minister telephoned the Leader of the Opposition, gave him all the information which was at his disposal, all the facts including certain things told to me by certain leaders, which I have not spoken here because some of them are matters of confidence. Now, isn't this beautiful? And really we should be writing about this and we should be talking about it. But what are you going to hear tomorrow perhaps is something entirely different but once the light is shown, darkness cannot beat light, you know, the candle you lit illuminates the darkness of the night so that we can see our way around in the corners.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition raised the issue of the Credit Unions and we have already been in consultation with the Credit Unions, in fact there are two Bills on the Credit Unions which are making there rounds, one out of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and one out of Caribbean Confederation of Credit Unions and we have a preference to the Bill out of the Central Bank which we have had some part in making and I believe that everybody will come around responsibly. So the Credit Union Member who says, why tighten the Regulations, we have good and responsible people at the top, well we need to have rules not just men and women, in any event you may have good and decent and sensible people at the top but yet they can make some wrong decisions if you have proper regulations they would not be able to make. Take for instance; one of CLICO's problems was that it had a high interest rate strategy to mobilize resources and to use those resources to purchase illiquid assets that is to say real estate in Trinidad and Tobago and in Miami, to give two examples, but the bottom of the market fell out for the real estate in Trinidad and Tobago created a cash shortage, several reasons but that is one, same thing in Miami.

Now, a question which the members in the Credit Unions in St. Vincent and the Grenadines should pose, 'do the Credit Unions in this country, do they not hold too much real property in relation to their other investments'? It is true that so far in St. Vincent and the Grenadines the property values have been rising, but suppose you start to have a dip for whatever reason and you can have it, it means that the value of the investment would be slashed. Under the Uniformed Banking Act and its predecessor commercial banks can only hold a certain proportion of their assets in real property, if they hold more than a certain percentage, the Central Bank directs them to divest, and if they do not divest they are opened to have their banking license revoked. A lot of people do not know that, so you might go to a general meeting and people in the Credit Union would say, man is a good buy, buy that thing, buy that, why you allow those people from overseas to come and get that? We are the people's organisation, buy it. But it may not be the wise thing to do; you have to know how much real estate you keep in your investment portfolio.

Mr. Speaker, those are some of the considerations and I am confident that the Credit Unions are ready to have a regulation by the single regulatory unit in the Ministry of Finance, in the same way that the Building Societies and more particularly the Building and Loan. And Mr. Speaker, when, if I may say parenthetically when people speak about credit unions and say well, what is Ralph talking about credit unions, I am a member of two credit unions, I pay \$100 in each of them every month, I wish if I could pay more but I cannot afford more because my salary is not as much as I would wish it, you know, but I am not complaining because I know what it was when I asked the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to give me the job, but I am just making the factual point at the same time. So, I am a member of two Credit Unions, I see the Honourable Senator Leacock is smiling, you belong to any? All right, I hope so, it is a good organisation, [Interjection] you cannot make \$100 [Laughter] but I thought when you came out of university you had proclaimed that by 30 you are going to be a millionaire, [Laughter] but you have been 30 a long time ago, you should have been a millionaire several times over [Laughter], in fact you should be owning one of the investments banks and leaving poor me to put in a little thing in the Credit Union. [Laughter] Anyway that is, that is.... [Laughter]

Mr. Speaker, it is good that the people see that on these fundamentals matters of regulation both the Government and Opposition are of one mind and it means that there is a sense of responsibility in the political directorate. What we have to do is to have that sense of responsibility percolate all the way down to our respective activists and sometimes some persons become prisoners of their political activist. I am too long in this business to be a prisoner of the activist, you listen to them but you do not become a prisoner. Those who are hungry for it tend to be easier prisoners, but do not be too hungry for it because power, you know Mr. Speaker, when you reflect on it can be an elusion, so I just make that point for reflection.

Mr. Speaker I beg to move that this Honourable House resolves itself into a committee of the Whole House to consider this Bill clause by clause.

HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

House went into committee.

House resumed.

Question put and agreed to
Bill reported passed the committee stage with one amendment.

DR THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I beg to move that a Bill for an act to amend the Building Societies act be read a third time by title and pass.

HONOURABLE LOUIS STRAKER: I beg to second the motion.

Question put and agreed to.
Bill read a third time by title and passed.

BANANA INDUSTRY BILL 2009

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the introduction and first reading of a Bill for an Act to repeal the Banana Industry Restructuring Act 2001, to make provision for the dissolution of the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Banana Growers Association. To facilitate the improvement of the Banana Industry in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and for other related purposes.

Mr. Speaker, the object of the Bill seeks to repeal the Banana Industry Restructuring Act 2001, to make provision for the dissolution of the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Banana Growers Association, to facilitate the improvement of the Banana Industry in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and to provide for other related purposes.

HONOURABLE SENATOR SABOTO CEASAR: I beg to second the motion.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: You second? Okay.

Question put and agreed to.
Bill read a first time

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Who second this Bill?

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Senator.....

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Senator Saboto Ceasar?

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Yes.

HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Bill be taken through all its stages at this sitting and passed.

Question put and agreed to.

HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that a Bill for an Act to repeal the Banana Industry Restructuring Act 2001, to make provision for the dissolution of the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Banana Growers Association, to facilitate the improvement of the Banana Industry in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and to provide for other related purposes to be read a second time.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Debate on the Bill. Honourable Minister ...

HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL: Mr. Speaker, the Banana Industry has been a major economic earner here in St Vincent and the Grenadines. And over the years the Banana Industry would have served this country well. For over 50 years we have seen that for all persons, for all those who were involved within the Banana Industry we have seen they would have benefitted tremendously.

Mr. Speaker, we would have seen many students benefitting from improved education at the Primary, at the Secondary and even at the tertiary level. We would have seen many homes being improved. We would have seen many beautiful SUVs that were bought for improved transportation. We have seen overall the great prosperity that was gained over the period. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately things have not remained the same.

At one time Mr. Speaker, the Banana Industry turned over approximately \$2million per week in this country; today the industry is turning over just about \$400,000 per week. But Mr. Speaker when the industry was new it gained momentum, the industry grew and metamorphosized and would have seen several changes from time to time so as to meet the growing demands required for the continued sustainability of the Industry.

Mr. Speaker, as the pressures were brought to bear on the industry changes were evident, changes were paramount for its survival, and so the reason for this Bill. And Mr. Speaker to understand the nature of this Bill is to understand the historic path that this Industry has trod over the years. Let me say Mr. Speaker, the industry in its infant stage that is when the industry began in the '50s, when the 'Geest' boat docked in Port Kingstown bananas were exported on stems, wrapped in Banana leaf. By the 1960s, the leaves were removed and bananas were exported wrapped in one inch foam. By the '70s Mr. Speaker, the Banana 'WETPACK System' came into being.

All of the bananas went to the Boxing Plants and they were processed in large tanks with water, of course, and their crowns treated. This was done really to enhance its appearance and its quality. But by the 1980s Mr. Speaker the 'Field Pack; Dry Pack System' was established and I recalled that when the bananas got to England and the housewives would have seen the crown pads on the stems, on the crown, they were saying these were bananas with sore foot. But by the '90s, Mr. Speaker, we would have moved to the 'Cluster Pack System' which we continue to do today but also established around that time were the special packs. Mr. Speaker, the Supermarkets from time to time have been demanding more and more, better quality of our bananas and so to stay in the business we had to continue to deliver what is required.

Mr. Speaker, 2000 and beyond where are we today? What we have is FAIRTRADE, FAIRTRADE as a label together with Global Gap and that is, you are to ensure that the fruits you place on the market do have traceability and you can refer those bananas, those products to a source. But it is interesting to note Mr. Speaker, when the Industry started in the '50s, the Industry started with a few business men getting involved. Those of us I believe who are a little older would have remembered the SoSo and the Jacks and so on who got involved, Bains.

And so, Mr. Speaker, production flourished because the business men enjoyed preferences at the market place. Production which was also one of estate plantocracy that helped to drive the production, however, by the '70s, Mr. Speaker, things would have changed significantly. What happened is that within the Agriculture Sector, there was a constant reduction of Cotton and of Arrowroot; and that banana production would have lend itself well to small farm operations in St Vincent. And so increasingly more and more farmers got involved into banana production and therefore making it a crop where they would have seen regular income.

Mr. Speaker, by the '70s, there were thousands of small farmers who were producing bananas and so at around this time this give rise to the establishment of Act No. 32 of 1978, which really give life and production of small farmers becoming part, becoming owners of an industry that they appreciated, that they were part and parcel of and that they find themselves having a stake within the industry. Mr. Speaker, the farmers were then proud because of their toil and sweat they were part of an overall industry.

After the establishment of this Act in 1978, Mr. Speaker, the Industry grew by leaps and bounds. We would have seen when things were good a total of up to 8,000 farmers growing bananas here in this country. Mr. Speaker, I recalled around that time in this country bananas were considered as '*green gold*' and many Vincentians outside of this country benefited and really wanted to have been be a part of the Banana Industry. But Mr. Speaker, when the coming on stream of the Single Market, in 1993, and its subsequent challenges by the Latin Americans, these challenges Mr. Speaker placed tremendous pressure on the Industry, resulting in lower prices, resulting in increased competitiveness of the industry, resulting in lost of confidence within the industry and many farmers exited the Industry.

Mr. Speaker we would have seen evidence of the various actions of the WTO, we would have seen the WTO rulings on the Open Banana Market Regime which would have suffered tremendously, which would have seen changes to the tariff and cause our Industry to retract. We would have seen further liberalization of the market and we would have seen continued erosion of our preferences. Mr. Speaker, equally, the Supermarkets which became the major outlets of our bananas we saw them establishing oligopolies to manipulate the banana trade and Mr. Speaker, even at one time we would have seen between the Supermarkets tremendous price war among themselves trying to establish who is the dominant Supermarket of selling bananas at lower prices, yet can reveal millions of dollars of profit every year.

And so, Mr. Speaker it is with all of these pressures bring to bear on the Industry over a period of time that when this administration came to office in 2001, it established Act No. 36 of 2001, to restructure the Banana Industry. We would have done that to ensure that the Industry could meet the challenges ahead. We would have started the process of restructuring both within the Banana Growers Association, WIBDECO in itself and the Industry overall; the process would have started. But while the process was going on many things continued to

happen. The local Banana Industry was under tremendous financial pressure and so the time has come when we have to finalise the restructuring; finalise the process and to place the Industry on better commercial footing.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill that is before us is based on three fundamental principles: it involves the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries playing a greater role in the production and management of bananas here in St Vincent and the Grenadines. It involves WIBDECO being responsible for purchasing and exporting bananas out of St Vincent. It involves WINFA FAIRTRADE to be responsible for the Data Base System within the Industry.

Mr. Speaker, specific to the Bill, Mr. Speaker, Clause 1, indicates the short title and its commencement. Clause 2 indicates the interpretation, Clause 3, indicates the responsibilities of the Minister and under such responsibilities Mr. Speaker, the Minister is to ensure proper managerial, technical and administration advice or training to registered farmers. Under such responsibilities it also includes prevention, control or eradication of pest and diseases that would affect the cultivation of banana plants. Of course, as you know the Ministry of Agriculture already would have been playing a vital role here in the control of the Mocha disease that would affected us somewhere in 2006. So, the Ministry is already on board.

Under such responsibilities as well, there is to be the promotion, promoting the interest and the efficiency of the Banana Industry by coordinating in collaboration with the producer organisations. It is important that the Ministry work with the producer organisations to ensure the kind of production that we are looking forward to. An equally, there is the responsibility to establish standards for production of bananas; very critical because quality sells bananas, and so when bananas are produced the quality that is exported has not only to be good but it must be sustainable at all times.

Mr. Speaker, Clause 4, deals with the Banana Division and under this Clause Mr. Speaker; it indicates what is required to establish the Banana Division and the supervision responsibility as well. The Chief Agriculture Officer is the one who would have direct control and the supervision of this Division. Equally the Public Service Commission or the Ministry as the case may be, may appoint or designate officers to the various works that would be required at what time. It also includes where under this Act that the responsibilities would be discharged to officers as directed by the Chief Agricultural Officer.

It also includes where the Banana Division will collaborate with the Plant Protection and the Quarantine Division of the Ministry and this is something that has been on going not only with the Banana Association but also with the Arrowroot Industry and other entities that are involved in agriculture production.

Clause 5, Mr. Speaker, deals with: Register of Banana Farmers, of course, presently within the Banana Growers Association, there is a Register of all farmers and so there will continue to be a register, to register all farmers.

Clause 6, Mr. Speaker deals with the Application for Registration as a Banana Farmer. Under the old Act, Mr. Speaker one would have become a banana farmer once he would have planted 30 mats, but in this new legislation, a banana farmer is one who would have cultivated at least 100 mats. And so, under this new Act, we have to understand that you become a banana farmer when you have at least 100 mats of bananas planted. And of course, as usual you would apply in writing to the Division to ensure your application is being dealt with.

However, your application may or may not be accepted depending on the information that is stated if the application is not satisfactory, more information can be required and can be asked for by the Banana Division, once it is satisfactory then your application will be accepted.

However, Mr. Speaker, if your application is denied Clause 7 which deals with the 'Right of Review', the person whose application may be rejected may within a specific time of three months apply to the Minister to have that decision reviewed. The Minister may appoint one, two or three persons to review the matter, but once the matter is being reviewed and a decision is made the decision is final by the Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Clause 8: Clause 8, deals with The Power to Enter Land for appraisal. Mr. Speaker, Clause 8 deals with Entering Land of Farmers, and whether or not you have an authority or not, to do the appraisal. An appraisal is being done for the various kinds of varieties that are being planted. Appraisals are being done in terms of the method of cultivation or harvesting. Appraisals are being done in terms of the equipment and material used and equally to ensure that compliance is being adhered within the cultivation of banana production.

But Clause 8 equally deals with the Authority on Entering Land where permission must be sought to enter the land of farmers and it also indicates where permission is not granted by any farmer or owner then an authorised person can still enter the land of that farmer or owner once a warrant is being issued by the Magistrate. It is important that we understand these areas within this legislation.

Clause 9, Mr. Speaker, deals with the Banana Industry Fund and for the purpose of this Act, Mr. Speaker, a fund will be established by the Accountant General known as the Banana Industry Fund, within this Fund monies will be allocated monies will be voted or contributions will be made to that Fund and so from this Fund monies will be used for the prevention, control and eradication of pests and diseases, monies will be used in terms of having new varieties and monies from the Fund can be used for any other matters prescribed by regulations under the Minister responsible for finance.

Mr. Speaker, Clause 10, deals with 'Regulation Regarding the Fund' and in this clause Mr. Speaker, the Minister responsible for finance may make regulations to provide for the procedures that shall govern or making disbursement of the Fund, the keeping of proper records and any other matter relating to the Fund as prescribed. However, regulations made under this section are subjected to negative resolution of the House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, Clause 11, deals with Purchase, Export and Marketing of Bananas and Clause 11 indicates that WIBDECO is the sole exporter and marketer of bananas produce here in St Vincent and the Grenadines to be exported to Europe. It also indicates that WIBDECO under written agreement between WIBDECO and any producer organisation having set out the details of the terms and conditions will be bounded in the purchase and export of bananas produced in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Already, there is the Sales and Purchasing Agreement and every year the Banana Companies would meet with WIBDECO and they would sit down and they would work out in terms of the quota for the year; how much you would have for sale and at what price; that the company would be paid for its fruit and so Clause 11 deals with that.

Clause 12, Mr. Speaker, deals with License to Export Bananas and Clause 12 indicates where

“No person shall export bananas out of St Vincent and the Grenadines unless he applies to the Banana Division for a license, in so doing he must make the consignment available for inspection and that is upon being issued a license the exporter shall pay a fee. And the fee that is being charged on a per box basis is being paid at a rate of \$4”.

So, for every box of banana that is being exported out of St Vincent and the Grenadines a license fee will be paid of \$4.

Mr. Speaker, Clause 13 deals with ‘The Allocation of Fees’; how it is being allocated and so:

“The Banana Division shall pay to the Accountant General the Fees charged for Licenses and the Accountant General shall allocate to the credit of the Fund \$3.60 on every box of bananas to that Fund and equally there is a portion that goes to WINCROP at a cost of \$0.64”.

Mr. Speaker, so the Fund managed by the Accountant General gets \$3.60 and WINCROP gets \$0.64 out of every box of bananas exported.

M. Speaker, Clause 14, deals with the Power of the Minister responsible for finance to vary fees and proportions. Mr. Speaker, from time to time there may be a situation where fees may have to be readjusted and so Clause 14 gives the Minister of Finance that authority to do so.

Clause 15, deals with ‘The Consultative Committee on the Banana Industry’. Mr. Speaker, Clause 15 establishes the position that a Consultative Committee be established and it should comprise the following members: a representative of the Windward Island Farmers Association, a representative of the St Vincent and the Grenadines FAIRTRADE Organisation, a representative of WIBDECO, a representative of the Ministry of Agriculture, and a representative from every producer organisation existing in St Vincent and the Grenadines, which is not really specified as I have done with these specific bodies.

Mr. Speaker, members of this committee will serve without compensation but shall be eligible for whatever travelling expenses they may incur. The Committee Mr. Speaker shall enquire into and consider any issue or any problem or any matter related to the development of the Banana Industry as referred to by the Minister. Again the Minister may or may not accept the advice of the Committee but it is important that there is a committee to assist in the directions of the Industry.

Mr. Speaker, Clause 16, deals with ‘Regulations’ and Clause 16 gives the Minister the authority to make regulations for giving them effect to the provisions of this Act.

Mr. Speaker, Clause 17, deals with ‘Dissolution’ and on the commencement of this Act, Mr. Speaker, The St Vincent and Banana Growers Association is dissolved and all assets, rights and liabilities of the St Vincent and the Grenadines Bananas Growers Association will be vest in the Government and any proceeding commenced

by or against the St Vincent and the Grenadines Bananas Growers Association may be continued by or against the Government.

Mr. Speaker, Clause 18, deals with the Banana Industry Restructuring Act 2001 being repealed. And so Mr. Speaker, as we would have realised at this point and time that the Banana Industry is heavily indebted at this time and it continues on a weekly basis to this kind of indebtedness. We cannot continue anymore with this kind of action and so while the market is demanding more and more FAIRTRADE bananas, more and more FAIRTRADE products, WINFA FAIRTRADE is already involved in a number of aspects of what the BGA is currently engaged and therefore, in terms of cost effectiveness they seemed to have been managing much more and I believe Mr. Speaker, as the Cabinet has so rightly did that we bite the bullet and move on

Mr. Speaker, we have been discussing these matters for quite some time. From time to time representatives of WINFA FAIRTRADE, of BGA, of WIBDECO, of the Ministry of Agriculture have been discussing these matters and having considerably and carefully thought about what is happening with regards to the present market requirements, the cost associated with the production and marketing of bananas here in the St Vincent and the Grenadines, the need for our farmers to have a greater share in the price paid to our banana farmers; this Government has considered it prudent enough to make significant policies with regard to changes that will allow for the greater efficiency and sustainability of the Banana Industry.

Mr. Speaker, this includes the dissolution of the 50 years old Banana Industry by repealing the ‘Banana Restructuring Act of 2001’ and the imposition of the new Banana Act. Mr. Speaker this also includes [interjection] the setting up of a Banana Unit within the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries with responsibilities for Extension Services, with responsibilities for Pest and Disease Management and Control, setting the kind of legal frame work to ensure the best regulations are in order for the operational issues we require.

Mr. Speaker, WINFA FAIRTRADE that will have responsibility for management of the Grower Accounts, management of the FAIRTRADE Label, management and control of the Banana Packaging materials, management and coordination of FAIRTRADE Export Quota, the formation of farmers into producer groups and will be also responsible for advocacy.

Mr. Speaker, WIBDECO will have the full responsibility for trucking, receiving and loading and for growers payments with assistance with WINFA and there will be a Consultative Committee to assist in the guidance of the Industry overall.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that with the matters identified in terms of the problems we are facing, we believe that with the introduction of this new piece of legislation that the Industry can be enhanced with its competitiveness and can be in a position to face the future of the Industry, with that Mr. Speaker. I am much obliged. [Applause]

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Further debate on the Bill. Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Mr. Speaker, despite its decline on relative sides the Banana Industry is important to us and today I expected to see in this legislation and I expect it to give me a picture of the instruction exercise since it repealed the previous Act. Mr. Speaker, I do not like this legislation at all. It seems to me that what we have developed here is a whole series of entities that are going to be involved in the Banana Industry and I see no clear management structure. In fact, the number of entities are increased and you have FAIRTRADE WINFA, you have WIBDECO, you have the Banana Division, you have the Ministry of Finance, you have the Fund, you have the Consultative Committee and it seems to me that we have a whole range of institution that are going to be involved and I see no clear structure. No clear structure in terms of responsibility. Who really is going to manage the Banana Industry? I understand the export side but the amount of institutions that are now going to be involved in the management of the Industry itself is something else.

Mr. Speaker, the Banana Division is suppose to carry out the responsibilities that have been assigned to the Minister of Agriculture and those responsibilities Mr. Speaker is that the Minister is to furnish managerial, technical and administrative advice to register the farmers or provide assistance in obtaining such advice. What does that mean? Does that mean that the Minister through his Banana Division is responsible for extension? What does it mean? I have difficulty understanding what it means. I understand prevent, control or eradicate pests.

“Promote the interest and efficiency of the Banana Industry by coordinating in collaborating with any producer organisation or Chair, the production, ripening, marketing and distribution of bananas”.

And I assume that the Banana Division which comes under the control of the Ministry of Agriculture or becomes a part of the Ministry of Agriculture will in fact carry out these functions. You have a producer organisation, if I could refer to WINFA FAIRTRADE in that context who is to play a major role or as far as I understand it; the major role in production. It is true that they have their particular concerns in relations to FAIRTRADE requirements. Who therefore is responsible, the Banana Division or FAIRTRADE?

I am unclear this is an amorphous instrument that is before us with many tentacles and there must be some central management of the process; otherwise they will have even more management problems than we have. Which of these entities is going to order the input? Any of these entities is going to order inputs? Ordering of inputs is a problem, is a serious problem. Who is going to do that? Who is going to give the information on what inputs need to be ordered when and at what time; and how much? I cannot get from this restructuring exercise here anything of the sort. You have the Input Warehouse, they alone going to be ordering, who are they doing it in consultation with; the Banana Division or FAIRTRADE?

Yesterday, you had a situation in this country where you had no bags for small bananas and small bananas had to be dumped. Why is that so? What I am getting at here Mr. Speaker is that I cannot see any clear management structure for the Industry which gives me confidence that what we are doing here is going to work. I just cannot see it. Now, I would expect that if you have a Consultative Committee that the entity responsible for ordering of inputs because it is not identified here would be part of that Consultative Committee. Any of these entities here ... does anyone one of them has this responsibility? Who really is controlling the process outside marketing? Which of these entities has the prime responsibility for that control? The Minister mentioned the need for

quality and all these things, which all of us agreed with but which entity: the Banana Division; WINFA FAIRTRADE who has that responsibility, for getting the bananas to the point where the marketers take over from WIBDECO? Who? Which entity? I cannot tell from this document. I have a great interest in this particular issue but I cannot tell from this document how the Industry is going to be managed, especially on the producer side.

If FAIRTRADE is going to have the responsibility, I assume that there is going to be some strengthening of their capacity in terms of staffing and so on to carry out that exercise. I do not know and I cannot tell from the document that is before us. For I see here:

“Promote the interest and efficiency of the Banana Industry by coordinating in collaboration ...”

I want to know who is managing, who has the responsibility and therefore, who is accountable to the farmers of this country. So, that is what we need to know from the restructuring exercise so that if today or tomorrow it is not functioning properly, you Mr. Minister with the overall responsibility will be able to approach the particular entity that has the responsibility for that management function. I cannot see this here. All I see is a patchwork of different units each carrying a function and it seems might be doing them separately. Who is in charge? Nobody.

I was under the impression that FAIRTRADE WINFA was going to be given a much more significant role in terms of the management and administration of the Industry that is the impression I had when there was this talk of restructuring. I do not know any longer. This document makes no mention in that regard except to refer to Producer Organisation and to say FAIRTRADE WINFA, and The Consultative Committee. But you mentioned something that they are expected to do; therefore my main concern is not to go through all of these. I want to understand who is managing the Banana Industry up to the stage where you hand over to those who are responsible for marketing the bananas.

You have a fund, you have responsibilities to the Minister, and you have responsibilities for the Banana Division. But there are responsibilities which the Minister does not have here which the Banana Division has, yet the Banana Division is supposed to carry out what the Minister wants. For instances, the collection of fees and so on have been pulled to the Banana Division. That is not part of your initial remit Mr. Minister. So this is an amorphous document, it has no focus and unless I can understand the focus Mr. Speaker and who has the responsibility and the accountability to the farmers of this country, I am not going to support it.

We are in an Industry which is already in deep trouble and now we are having all these sets of entities, everyone doing its own thing. Who is responsible for credit? Can anyone tell me from this document because the Fund, the Fund is not for credit? The Fund is there for certain specific activities not for credit to farmers. Is WINFA FAIRTRADE going to take over some of the other functions that the association carried and they are not here? I do not know, and that is the problem Mr. Speaker with this piece of legislation. I see no point in going down clause by clause until I understand the focus and the lines of responsibilities all these things have to be coordinated you know, the Fund, the Banana Division, the Input Warehouse, all these thing have to be coordinated and somebody must be responsible for it, some entity must be able to be called to account. Instead

we have this thing here like octopus with a whole set of tentacles with no functioning center. And this is a very serious matter Mr. Speaker, very serious matter indeed. Government is going to be called upon if we have. Government is going to be called upon if we have any difficulty in financial matters; but of course some of those difficulties arise of a lack of management or bad management. So if the intention is for WINFA Fairtrade to be strengthened, strengthen WINFA ...and put it here, so we could see clearly that they have that responsibility, and I know that is going to involve some increase staffing for WINFA. I really do not know what we have here. I am not going to speak any longer on it Mr. Speaker, I believe this matter should go to a Select Committee of the Parliament.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Further debate on the Bill. Honourable Senator, Leacock.

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to this Bill that is before us, this Act that we are trying to pass, to repeal the Banana Industry Re-structuring Act; 2001. Mr. Speaker, I mean there are so many places you can start to discuss this subject matter that I have to take my time and really try to make some sense as to what is before us. We could easily start for example by admitting that in 2001 when the Government of the day came into office they met the industry with certain challenges and they in their own deliberate wisdom brought a new administrative structure into being to address the problem as they perceive them at that time.

I did not hear very much Mr. Speaker, as to where or how that body succeeded or failed or where they were overcome by the rapidly changing circumstances. Let us discuss the matter with some fair degree of realism of it; it is probably not really very easy or good time for anyone to be managing the Banana Industry period. I believe every day you wake up as a Manager, whether it is at the policy level or at the Executive Management level there is a new problem that is facing you. You can hardly get your hand wrap around before there is a new problem. But that is the reality, but I would have liked to hear a little bit more as to what went wrong, because I recalled one of the principle concerns that we raised at that time on this side of the House was whether the decision to place more responsibility at the Cabinet level was in fact a wise one as against the traditional practice in which the producer and stakeholders in particular the farmers, had much greater say in their own affairs.

Today, we could only conclude that to the extent we agree to repeal that Re-structuring Act that the Government has by admission come before this Parliament to say that they have failed and failed miserably in the re-structuring exercise. [Interjection] Well, unless you are going to show me where it is otherwise, then I have to conclude that it is a failure. If it is not broken why fix it? Mr. Speaker the Honourable Minister in presenting his case for this Bill before us understandably traced the history of the industry from the visionary years of the '50s when the entrepreneurs of the day the Bains and the Jacks and others saw the opportunity and progressed to the stage where they built a fairly successful industry.

Of course, we could leapfrog to the '70s when banana basically had little or no problems that is as much as we could produce once we met certain quality standards, we could sell. It was essentially a marketing challenge. And people could go back to the days of the wars even between ourselves in the Windward Islands, Jamaica and others fighting for market share. In fact, I have done my own research my university days in the marketing of bananas in the mid '70s. I want to recall that banana was so flourishing as the Minister said, it was 'green gold'

that when we developed what we call 'freedom land' in the Lauders, Greggs and Lowmans area, how those communities took off and transformed themselves; it is the glory days.

But we know for a fact Mr. Speaker, that bananas was essentially managed by the farmers themselves, and they enjoyed certain amount of success. Now, I think what we really want to come to grips with and to be honest with ourselves is that they were different times, and we know that Government always had a major stake in the industry. To be sure there was an extent to which we could define the government as the facilitator or enabler of the industry, largely because much of the infra-structure that was necessary to support the industry had to be put in place.

I am talking about things like: the wharf, deep water wharf, the shed, feeder roads and a range of other ancillary services. That was beyond the requirements of the farmers per se. So there was a partnership and a fair partnership, if I may say that as well because government had a great interest in the success of the farmers. After all, it was bananas bringing in pounds sterling, and tourism bringing in US dollars that built the economy that we have today. They were our principle exchange earners and government clearly had to have that stake hold in it.

But the fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, why we are here today, which I think the Honourable Minister is leading to is that bananas like, just as what is happening in finance and other service sectors today is facing the challenge from the new globalised world; the trade liberalisation that we are talking about. In essence Mr. Speaker, we have to come to grips with the fact that no longer can us in St Vincent and the Grenadines continue to build an economy on the basis of monopoly protection. That is the challenge that we really have. That is what has happened to us for the last fifty or so years. Not just in St Vincent, it is a whole Caribbean phenomenon, whether it was bauxite, whether it was nutmegs, whether it was oil, whether it was sugar, whether it was cotton, the Caribbean simply got by, on a monopoly culture.

And as the trade rules have changed so too have our challenges and there is a requirement for us as a people to determine how we are going to meet these challenges. One does not want to get very academic about the exercise but sometimes that approach is useful in so far as it could provide us with certain guidelines. One for example, Mr. Speaker, bananas is not an infant industry, it is a mature industry and to the extent that we recognise that it informs the approach to dealing with the problems of the industry.

What one therefore, gathers in listening to this presentation today, of the Honourable Minister is that to the extent that we can bring some structural improvements or perceived structural improvements, then the industry would live happily ever after. And what are the essential features of those structural changes, that is as far as I am concerned:

- (1) A further alienation of the farmers as the principle producers from the decision making process,
- (2) Bring the structure closer to the political hierarchy.
- (3) Improve the power of the Minister;

(4) the Chief Agriculture Officer.

And if so fact, or abracadabra, we still have a more sustained industry, but it does not work so. You cannot go with cheap diagnosis of problems and expect to come up with adequate solutions. And too often we as a people in the Caribbean, St. Vincent included and this administration is going the route of shortcuts for fundamental problems and the Banana Industry is a typical example of that situation.

I have listened to many debates on this industry you know, that is to the extent that we do not have additional protection, and then we have no future. Well, I do not necessarily subscribe to that, and that is one reason why for example, the significant initiatives of the Fairtrade Organisation are an appropriate response to the change of dynamics. Very, very appropriate because it captures important elements that could lead to success, namely: decision-making still resides significantly among the farmers and it also involves the people who are taking risk and a business approach to the problem.

Now, I could ask you a fundamental question: *Why does government want to take all this control?* You do not produce a pound of bananas. You do not dig a hole but you want to control a whole industry and bring at the back end of the discussion, the major stakeholders for consultative purposes after the horse has bolted. No! No! If you genuinely and sincerely want input into the matter then at the very least the Consultative Committee comprised of WIBDECO, FAIRTRADE officials Truckers, other agriculture interest parties should be front loaded into the exercise. Because as the Honourable Leader of the Opposition makes the point; what we are establishing here is a recipe for confusion; who really runs things? After all, the Act makes it very clear, it is the Minister; he calls the shots through his Chief Agriculture Officer, the principle technical point man.

But when we have advice from a Consultative Committee and you have another body of opinions from the in-house technical staff; where do you go to the escape valve? That the Minister is not necessarily bound; to take the advice of the Consultative Committee? Well, I will guarantee you that if after a very short period of time 1,2,3,4, times that committee comes to the conclusion that they are nothing else but a rubber stamp to the extent that they have already given of themselves free of charge, they will simply refuse to proffer advice to the Ministry and leave the whole lot with you. That is one of the outcomes you could possibly find yourself into.

So, we have to stand back and put our grey matter to work in this industry as indeed we have to do to several other sectors of the country and look at a long term future for the industry, from the agricultural point of view, from marketing point of view, from the political perspective from the importance of the industry itself as a foreign exchange earner, from the fact that it is also a cash crop, from the point of view that bananas as a production activity has implication for urban rural drift. All these complexities have to be put into the mix, in coming to a decision that we could live with and direct the future of St Vincent and the Grenadines.

And I say to you with all honesty Mr. Minister that the time has come where we Vincentians as an educated people, and I am speaking about the extra Vincentian community because I am not speaking about the 105,000 of us who are here. We have a body of expertise and intelligence the world over in some of the best international corporations with marketing experience, with finance experience, with agro-processing experience that we can tap into to resolve our problems. And I say that to make the point that one of the possibilities for addressing the future of this industry is to begin to look seriously at what we call factor endowments.

Quite obviously, we cannot compete with other banana countries because at base production cost, the cheap labour, the large estates, the high mechanization, perhaps cheaper finance gave them an advantage. But alas, what we can do from a marketing point of view with the value added of bananas gives us a hope. Why do we have to wait when we go into the supermarkets of London or the Caribbean to see all the derivatives of banana the twenty something plus products? Are we still at the stage as a Caribbean people, where we must export cocoa and sugar and then import Cadbury Chocolate?

When I go to the supermarkets abroad I see the range of products that have been produced from our primary produce but people can do the value added processes to make those things competitive. Then Mr. Speaker, I am worried because yes it is easy and it is cheap to speak about comparative advantage. We do have a comparative advantage in bananas against certain countries, but that is not where the question lies. The question lies in the competitive advantage, the managerial efficiencies, the vision, the foresight and we started getting there some years ago, when we look down the valley chain and we introduced WIBDECO, which all of you ... regrettably Minister, I think you might have been part of that ... scuffed at and you brought people where the '*banana salvation committee*' ... WIBDECO is supposed to be the worst thing ever invented, today it now becomes '*the saviour*' of the industry, remember that? The same WIBDECO today the saviour was cast aside a few years ago. And that is the kind of forward thinking where we are owning the plantations, where we own the ships, where we own the license, where you are putting good marketing expertise to work. Those same kinds of application are relevant to this industry.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, and this might be an aside, but I say to you in all honesty because I heard it coming from the Governor of the Central Bank some nights ago, a point that I have been making; there is absolutely no future for our agriculture bananas including or diversified agriculture until such time, all of you Ministers of Agriculture begin to produce your Annual Budgets collectively. Not on the basis of St. Vincent, St Kitts, Grenada and Dominica. We have to know the total acreage of land we have and determine in the diversification programmes how we can do tannias, eddoes, papaw and guava whatever it is to fill those containers on a weekly basis. To have contained new market opportunities industry, in the same model that banana progress.

We have to take that and apply it again to agriculture in general. We have to begin to think that here in St. Vincent we have in Campden Park the Brewery; with Coco Cola the world's largest corporation that produces Gatorade and health foods and in the same way as of Christmas just went by they can give us Cranberry drink. And we have our own Flour Mills in which we have an interest, what are the possibilities?

[Interjection] Well, the Private Sector, say it is the Private Sector, that is the partnership I am talking about because what you are doing as a government is moving away from the philosophy and understanding that the Private Sector must be built. Because I am not saying that they exist because we have problems with the Private Sector we probably have to build a Private Sector here as well. But we have to begin to look and see what we can do through our agri or industry and perhaps some of those have to become part of our stimulus packages you know, but I do not want to go off subject, I want to get back to the industry; to show that a lot of what we have here create problems for us Mr. Speaker.

We cannot continue and feel we will succeed with a new structure however, well designed or well intended that is hinged on a principle of monopoly protection because ultimately what we are really saying is that the

taxpayers of this country will pay through their teeth for the inefficiencies and the waste. That is what we are saying because that is what government is it is taxpayer's money. So, Mr. Speaker, I do not like to see the increase hand of government through the Minister in the industry at this time. I support the call from the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to go back to our sub-committee for us to discuss this thing, to knock it about and hammer it out for us to get a better solution.

What I see here is what we in our field called an isomorphic approach to management, it simply means, one way or the highway. It means everything has to have the same sort of resemblance, and it is really very funny you know, because there is a major contradiction of this government here now, your administration. For the last four, five six years of the Government it is reasonable to say that you have done more than the previous administration in trying to bring on board more parastatals or private companies to gain greater efficiency and competence and freedom to do things.

And you have the road and bridges coming, for example a case in point, but this one you seemed to be going the other way you know, to use the Prime Minister's expression *'you behaving like a left hand lennie man; you licking up de country'*. *'Check yourself before you wreck yourself'* clearly, you are in the wrong direction. The industry does not need any more political control. It does not need more political directives. It needs more farmer input, it needs more farmer empowerment, and it needs a body of people who are up and running and I suggest that already with WINFA and the FAIRTARDE Organisation it gives great encouragement. We have a flat bed if you want to call it that, we have an architectural framework upon which we could build to build this industry.

Mr. Speaker, me just raise one or two questions in the Bill itself Section (8), this address the question for example, for entering on people's land, says

“The Minister shall make a reasonable effort to obtain permission to enter from the person”

What is a reasonable permission; one phone call; two phone calls? One letter; two letters, and an email, a fax, a private conversation on the road? That is too loose, it has to be definitive. We need to know what a reasonable effort is, because in this small country there is possibility for all kinds of abuse. We need to tighten that we need to define what is reasonable. We need to say whether the person must be written over a three month period, three consecutive letters of warning or request or whatever it is. Let us tighten those kinds of loose things.

Well, the Banana Industry Fund. How is this fund going to be managed and for what purpose? The Leader raised the question. I suspect that with the extent of the overdrafts and the losses that they incurred, that you are not going to make fun out of this. It really is not intended to provide the kind of up front assistance the farmers have been accustomed to. In fact, I get a sense that the days of credit for the industry are gone. And basically you are sending a message that every pot must now be on its own bottom. Farmers now have to stand on their own legs. If that is so and you have made that determination carefully, well you have the solutions; tell them so now. Tell them you cannot carry them any more.

That is why I asked whether Senator Saboto Ceasar second this, you know. Because coming out of banana land I want to tie his hand to the decision [interjection] and his foot too. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, 10 (1) of this Legislation, it is not that I do not understand you know, but maybe I do not want to understand. It says:

“Subject to subsection (2), the Minister responsible for finance may make regulations to provide for the following matters:

- (a) the procedure which shall govern the making of disbursements from the Fund;**
- (b) the keeping of proper records ...”**

And all the other sorts of things you know, I get a sense sometimes that when it comes to money matters, that there is a kind of skepticism. Mr. Speaker, I cannot say that you guys on that side over there. My Honourable colleagues on the other side have limited confidence in spending money. Your Honourable Minister of Finance is not so sure that you can go beyond certain ceilings. Money and the spending of it is something that is resolved for some people who have acquired some special kind of acumen or some special thing; I do not know. But if in 2009 and beyond as an Honourable Minister you cannot manage the Funds; if this is the way the Bill was going then pack up and go home.

That is what we have professional public service for, the continuity in governance. [Interjection] If I honestly believe that I believe that you have successfully destroyed the Public Service and you must make a stringent effort, a firm effort [interjection] to return the Public Service to the public servants that is what I believe. That is what I believe Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Do not speak for me. Do not speak for me at all. [Interjection]
Laughter

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Mr. Speaker 11 (1):-

**“WIBDECO is the sole exporter and marketer
of bananas produced in Saint Vincent and the
Grenadines and exported to Europe”**

I suspect that they are leaving room for the Caribbean, and the United States of America for ... do not ask me why I said the United States of America. I identified the United States of America perhaps, because to the extent that we can also build partnerships and integrate tourism with agriculture. [Interjections]

Ideas, Not only Ideas. This is what I am trained to do. We can perhaps, begin to speak with the Cruise Lines to supply bananas because there is great partnership taking place between the Cruise lines and many Caribbean destinations. Building of deep water harbours, [interjection] tourism plans and other things. We have got to get up. But I could understand the dilemma you know, because I am not the one who says you all do not read the budget or deal with the Estimates.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Member would you please address the Chair

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Yes ... Mr. Speaker you are quite right.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: I do not want that dialogue...

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: You are quite right Mr. Speaker, and I apologise to you. And we have agreed on this. I see the Honourable Prime Minister waiting to go, rearing to go. He cannot wait to get off the seat and out the stable. [Laughter] [Interjection]. I know, [interjection] I know, [interjection], I know [laughter], I had to draw you out man. I had to draw you. I had to draw you out and get you from stop chewing your cud. [Laughter], [interjections].

Mr. Speaker, I do not think genuinely, that this Bill really does anything meaningful, really meaningful to improve the future of the industry. I recognize fairly and truly that the industry has challenges but the virtual wholesale taking over of the industry by the Government; I do not believe that that is the way to go. I believe we should back off a little bit have more discussion and dialogue at the Select Committee stage, make some amendments and come forward in the interest of a better St Vincent and the Grenadines. Much oblige Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Further debate, Honourable Senator Cummings.

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: Thank Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with the issue of banana cultivation and its impact on our society is a very serious one and therefore the discussion of the Bill that is before us today behoves a mature approach devoid of Party politics. Mr. Speaker, in my life time thus far I have planted a few holes of banana as well, but I do not consider myself to be a farmer. But I ask myself, if I were a farmer and I look at what is happening in the industry today and I take a comprehensive look at this Bill before us would I smile, would I scratch my head, would I sell my land or would I get out of the industry.

And I asked myself if the statement by the Honourable Minister of Agriculture relating to the dissolution of the Banana Industry was a slip of the tongue or a reality. I have to agree most wholeheartedly with the Honourable Leader of the Opposition in his concern of the management structure within which the industry is being placed. Mr. Speaker, at a time when efficiency is the watch word, I cannot begin to understand why a unit somewhere in the Government calling itself the irrigation unit plays no role whatsoever in this exercise. I am flabbergasted. Even at the level of the advisory body no reference to irrigation in agriculture in today's day and age? And I wonder, you know, why we are not thinking outside of the box?

We have agonized for a considerable period of time about the future of the Banana Industry. We have spoken about diversification in the agriculture sector. We are attempting to amalgamate in some strange way a number of entities that are associated specifically with bananas but when you look at what is happening in agriculture not just here, I cannot begin to understand, why are we not using a commonsensical approach to this very perplexing issue? Why any ... I mean let us think back a little bit. It is quite clear that the Banana Association is a dismal failure; the banana entity that was established in the Act of 2001. An absolute failure; no one even its leader could argue about that; dismal failure.

And it has failed for a number of reasons it was premised on the wrong understanding of the industry a very changing something. And it refused to involve the very people who sustained the industry the farmers. I cannot believe in today's day we will create such an entity. The irrigation unit ... and I can speak of this because I was part of its genesis. The irrigation unit has done a number of studies about farmers groups – I wonder how many of them have been implemented. With specific objectives of ensuring that the irrigation systems that we put down will be effectively maintained and they take direct responsibility. And they were also supposed to be involved in the wider management of the farm issues.

There was a lot of dialogue you know about those farmers unit, very interesting ... what I find disappointing about that in the way it hasn't gone, is that while the Europeans wanted to impose some regimes on us that were totally alien ... as I said to the irrigation manager recently, certainly there are very good aspects of those proposals that we can amend to suit our local conditions and get the farmers on board. But Mr. Speaker, I want to suggest in this exercise you know, I am going to throw this out and in my usual way I do not hold back on my ideas never mind a lot of people throw cold water on them.

The time has come for us to be talking not merely about a Banana Industry Association but an Agriculture Products Body; where you can combine all of the resources in a clear cut administrative process, functional and clear; involving all of the people who matter. Where are the farmers like Hugh Stuart? I am talking qualified farmers. I am talking people who went to the University to study agriculture and come back and practice it and making a livelihood out of it. Why aren't these people involved in helping to shape the future not just of banana but of agriculture?

The Honourable Leader talks quite correctly about WIBDECO and the potential for WIBDECO to be involved not just in marketing bananas but some other commodities. [Interjection] We have a number of areas ... You know some people throw me off my thoughts, you know. This is a serious matter [interjection] this is a very serious matter. We tend to allow ourselves to get boxed in to banana, banana, banana. Banana, I believe will continue to play a role in agriculture in this country but we are slighting for too long a number of other products and the offshoots of that. We cannot be looking narrowly.

If you look seriously at how banana is dwindling, any management structure that you are going to put in place to manage it is going to be top heavy. In other words, the more the banana reduces the less it becomes viable to have an effective management system and so you have to look at the economies of scale and put a proper system in place that will encompass not just banana, but the changing face of agriculture production in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

This is a wake up call and when we stand in this parliament Mr. Speaker and make pronouncement on these Bills, some people believe that they have a monopoly on ideas. I believe this is the kind of discussion that we all should have had before this Bill was brought before parliament and I endorse again the sentiments of my leader: go back to the drawing board. This document makes my stomach turn [interjection] as a farmer, this one will give me nightmares; give me nightmares man. This has no direction. It has no purpose. This is a recipe for disaster; this is chaos personified. This is not salvation for the Banana Industry; this is not a working arrangement.

I am not attempting Mr. Speaker, to suggest that my idea is the only working one, but I throw it out very deliberate and I believe the future must look wider in the context [interjection] of agriculture. Mr. Speaker when a bit of legislature of this kind is looking ... and a considerable portion of it goes into how you admit farmers, how you register farmers; when we look at what is happening in the Banana Industry, people have not been joining the industry. People have been leaving in droves you know, people have been leaving in droves and the section that talks about the condition under which people should come in and so on is like *'pie in the sky'*

Who in their right mind; who in their right mind at this day is going to ... however they come into possession of a piece of land ... go into planting bananas, if you have not been doing it before. According to the legislation anybody would say who has been producing bananas before is automatically registered. So, I find this section about ... farmers in itself quite interesting and I am wondering if we are really serious. Whether this piece of legislation was an attempt by someone overnight to take a jigsaw puzzle and cut it up and re-shape it.

Mr. Speaker, I wish I could speak in other terms about this legislation but it is an issue that for me is a serious one. The Bill is really not ready; it has too many areas of concerns, it has no clarity, it has no focus and it has no directions and I urge in line with my colleagues on this side that the Bill be given a very serious overhaul. I wish to thank you.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Further debate? Honourable Prime Minister.

DR. HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult for me to comprehend that a simple Bill of this nature should cause so much confusion in the minds of persons who we all accept gone to a university and who has studied one subject or the other professionally. So, I cannot conceive that it has anything to do with the Bill but all to do with politics that is all.

So, the very claim by the Honourable Senator Cummings that we must keep Party politics out of it; that is in fact the motive force of his commentary. Unity Labour Party is securing the banana belt and you want to say you could make an inroad by somehow rubbishing a Bill which comes on bananas and then it will give you some Brownie points. Unfortunately, it does not happen like that. I was educated on bananas, not on haberdashery. I grew bananas as a young man and in fact, I am so deeply tied to the agriculture sector that is where I am going back to live and I have lands where I will do farming around me.

In fact, even going back there, they saying *'he become a rasta, he building up in the hills'* and the residence which I am building there has become an object which they go and gaze at, like how they use to go and look at Rabacca River [interjection] wishing it to wash away. Rabacca Bridge, sorry, wishing it to wash a way; like they want my own house to wash away.

Mr. Speaker, It is very interesting that Senator Cummings said that he has sided with the Leader of the Opposition but not with Senator Leacock and he is quite correct because their positions are diametrically opposed. The Leader of the Opposition says: *"he does not know who is in control of this amorphous entity"* whereas, the Honourable Senator Leacock says: *"it is the Minister"* the government has taken control of everything, so on the one hand, it says that it is an amorphous entity with tentacles with no center. Senator Leacock says; *"it has a center"* and even though you have a number of tentacles, never mind the tentacles it is

the center. It is the Minister who drives everything. That is a mean ... You know I really don't ... I sat here in utter amazement.

Mr. Speaker, the structure of this Bill administratively, there are three provisions, sorry, four provisions and they are very straight forward:

Clause (3) which deals responsibilities of the Minister;

Clause (4) the Banana Division;

Clause (11) Purchase, Export and Marketing of Bananas;

Clause (15) Consultative Committee: on the Banana Industry.

Mr. Speaker, what has happened in this structure is that the circumstances of the industry over the past few years have caused, have occasioned the necessity to transform the administrative arrangements, the diminution of the preferences in the European Market, which meant that the only area in which you can have some special premium will be FAIRTRADE and you have a particular niche in the market place. So, what did we have? What did the market regime and the market condition precipitate?

There was the Banana Growers Association, which was restructured in 2001, and at the time it was restructured, maybe, 5% of the bananas were FAIRTRADE, and FAIRTRADE bananas were looked upon with hostility. The market regime and the market conditions altered the basis for the industry by having FAIRTRADE becoming almost 100% of the bananas exported to Europe. So, the Banana Growers Association was essentially seeking to administer things, which they really they no longer controlled; that is to say production. FAIRTRADE was involved in that.

Why should farmers be subjected to an entity the Banana Growers Association with high administrative cost along with FAIRTRADE to administer declining volumes and values of bananas? So, what do you do you separate the production areas and let FAIRTRADE and any other producing entity which wants to get involved in bananas; like for instance SVG Producers. Let them be involved in that area, and let the State stick to what you may call the agronomic aspects of bananas; dealing with spraying; dealing with pests; dealing with technical advice; extension service and the like. So, those are two sets of functions 1. in the Ministry of Agriculture where the state is carrying out certain specific agronomic functions as I have just sketched them.

WINFA FAIRTRADE engages essentially in the marketing and the actual production, and then if there are other producers like for instance SVG Producers; in which Hugh Stuart is a very important Private Sector person and Lennox Hux Da Breo and others, they will also grow their bananas not to WINFA FAIRTRADE specifications because they are not interested in marketing in Europe, but they are interested in marketing in the Caribbean and they sell through the Caribbean. Traffickers will buy their bananas and also sell in the Caribbean; in other words, the circumstances of the market have caused, have precipitate a profound liberalisation of the trading arrangements and thus it will follow of the production arrangements and of the administrative arrangements. So, what appears to be advance nuclear physics, which people cannot understand, is a very simple issue.

Now, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition says *“he sees so many entities”*.

The entities which are here are less than in the Banana Restructuring Bill of 2001, and less in fact, than the Banana Growers Association Act, which preceded the Restructuring Bill. Indeed, what this Bill has done is to seek to manage the liberalisation in an integrated way. [Applause] That is what is happening here.

So, Article (3) says, I mean Clause (3) says:

“The Minister is responsible for the general administration of this Act”.

It does not mean that because he is responsible for the general administration that the Minister controls it; because it goes on:

“In particular, it is the responsibility of the Minister to:

- (a) furnish managerial, technical and administrative advice or training to registered farmers or provide assistance in obtaining such managerial, technical and administrative advice or training;**
- (b) prevent, control or eradicate pests that affect the cultivation of bananas or banana plants;**
- (c) promote the interests and efficiency of the banana industry by coordinating, in collaboration with any producer organisation or trader;**

It could have put inside there WINFA FAIRTRADE and SVG Producers and Traffickers; but it has not done that because it takes account of what is happening in the real world. Anyone of them: the production; ripening; marketing and distribution of bananas. So, it works with these entities.

Now, at this point, let me pause here to say critical in that marketing arrangement is WIBDECO, because WIBDECO has the contract with WINFA FAIRTRADE. WIBDECO does not have any contract with SVG Producers because SVG Producers is not certified as a FAIRTRADE producer, and WIBDECO is marketing FAIRTRADE bananas. That is the reality.

(d) Establish the standards for the production of bananas in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and ensure compliance with such standards”.

Well, you know issues relating to ... when WIBDECO says:

“In response to the market place you must have global gap standards”.

The State takes that on to facilitate and help the farmer. And WINFA in the case of the European Market; and SVG Producers and the Traffickers in relation to the Caribbean Market, they do what they do grow bananas and they sell them.

Clause (4); what Clause (4) says is that look: there is the Minister but the Minister does not do it. The Minister does it through a Banana Division. The full crown of the Banana Division is the Administrator, the Chief Agricultural Officer, so when Senator Cummings, Senator Leacock says: “where are the Civil Servants?” That is where he is. It says here in Clause 4 (3):-

“The officers of the Banana Division shall discharge the responsibilities and function of the Minister under this Act as directed by the Chief Agriculture Officer”.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I will give way.

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Thank you very much.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: I am on a role; I am playing shots ‘eh’

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: It is a good way to start the year.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Yeh! Yeh! I know you would have appreciated the innings.

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Thank you. [Interjection] Mr. Speaker, I think the Honourable Prime Minister, and I want to believe is unintentionally misleading the Honourable House on the point I made. I in fact established that the Chief Agriculture Officer was the principal technical officer guiding the process, and that it led to potential conflict between him and the Consultative Committee. In fact, the Chief Agriculture Officer we all know is a Public Servant. You should not Honourable Prime Minister.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: But really, I am still at a lost.

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: The point you are saying ... [interjection]

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Let us [Inaudible]

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: My friend Senator Leacock got up thought he had an idea, did not formulate it and is hearing the idea for the first time when he spoke. Because it lacked clarity; I mean that is what happened in this case, I mean let us understand it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Senator Cummings says: “now what is happening to the Irrigation Unit”. The Irrigation Unit is functioning within the rubric and frame of the Chief Agricultural Officer; we do not have to detail every single entity. Are we going to detail the extension officers, we are going to detail this and that? No! You do not want to over bureaucratize it, it is an administrative apparatus. So that is the second area.

The next area of the Bill, the question of purchase, export and marketing of bananas, Clause 11:

“WIBDECO is the sole exporter and marketer of bananas produced in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and exported to Europe”.

Incidentally, that comes essentially from the preceding legislation. It goes on

The purchase and export by WIBDECO of bananas produced in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and exported to Europe, shall be under written agreement between WIBDECO and any producer organisation or trader setting out the details of the terms and conditions that both parties will be bound by in the purchase and export of bananas produced in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines”.

The only entity today which it has that arrangement with is FAIRTRADE. The entity tomorrow is FAIRTRADE. FAIRTRADE is in the real world existing and that is why the Bananas Growers Association, the real world had marginalised it . So, we are taking care of the agronomic functions, WIBDECO is arranging the marketing and WINFA FAIRTRADE, they are doing what they are doing now, organising the farmers in producing in groups. I do not have to detail that because that is WINFA FAIRTRADE mandate because they have their own constitution.

They have advocacy, they will manage growers account as they do now. And they will manage the certification of FAIRTRADE producers as they do now. They will manage their FAIRTRADE label and make it sustainable as they do now. And they will manage and co-ordinate control of all banana packaging material which is something which the BGA had but as a producer organisation because we have now hived off the agronomic functions into the Ministry of Agriculture, the Banana Division doing it and the Chief Agricultural Officer being the principal instrument, that area now naturally comes with WINFA FAIRTRADE and if you are having export quotas with FAIRTRADE, FAIRTRADE will manage that as they will do now.

Mr. Speaker, so the mystery is really... I cannot believe that the Opposition does not understand bananas. I really do not want to believe that because I could understand why he lost every single seat in the banana belt. You do not understand bananas; because you spoke without understanding it.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: You talk what you want to talk.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Well, that is the point you know[interjection] you belong to the flat earth society, if you say the earth is flat, it is flat, it does not matter if I bring proof to the contrary.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: You talk what you want to talk.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Yes.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: I have my views. You have yours.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Yes. But what I am going to do you know, I am going to have this go to the Select Committee. I want you to put your mouth ... you do not come to Select Committee meetings... as you suggested I am going to put it to a Select Committee.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: You never went to one. You ever went to any?

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Who me? That is not true. [Interjection] That is not true. [Interjection] That is not true. That is not true. I am going to say to the farmers ... You challenge me? [Interjection] I am going to pick up your challenge. I want you to come.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: When you go to the Select Committee [inaudible].

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: I want you to come to the Select Committee. I want to see ... You have already said on Radio "*I am not getting involved in any of that*" I want to see now whether you will come to this because you have said so. You said you want it. I will do it. It is no problem. Mr. Speaker, then look at the structure. [Interjection] I have put ... we have had the structure of the Minister, the Banana Division with limited functions. In fact, under this Bill it is the least authority that the State has ever had in the direction of the Banana Industry. Under this Bill it is the least authority the State has ever had.

The entities which are having the authority would be WINFA FAIRTRADE, and WIBDECO in that area and SVG Producers if they are doing their trafficking in the region. And let me say this Mr. Speaker [interjection] No! You see, I know this thing like the back of my hand. I grew up on... I tell you haberdashery ... did not send me. I am in bananas from the time you put '*Catta pon you head*' and carrying the bunch even before [interjection]

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Mr. Speaker, would the Honourable Prime Minister please indicate where in the Bill a role has been identified for WINFA along the line that he has associated, save and except for being on that I think that committee. Where in the Bill is WINFA'S role and FAIRTRADE identified. All I am asking is to show me which clause.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: I have just done that.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: The question is ...

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Could you point to the specific to the specific Clause that speaks to the role of FAIRTRADE as identified. Just state that.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: The question is put Honourable Prime Minister.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Clause 11:-

"Any producer organisation or trader..."

And the entities which exist the principal one is WINFA FAIRTRADE it does not have to be mentioned; because it is the contract between WIBDECO and that entity. In other words you allow them to liberalise it. Now, Mr. Speaker, having set up that structure there is an entity which is required to provide an overall strategic view of the development of the industry and that is where the consultative body comes in. Because if you see what it is defined as Mr. Speaker, it says in Clause 15 (6):-

“The committee shall enquire into and consider any issue, problem, or matter related to the development of the Banana Industry”

So when WINFA, FAIRTRADE, WIBDECO and the Ministry and all the producer organisations other than WINFA and FAIRTRADE: the members of the Committee... there is one suggestion which the Leader of the Opposition made which is a useful suggestion that is on that Committee we should have the Input Warehouse Company because of the fertilizer. And there is no problem with that because they communicate with them all the time. But I want to say this; the Honourable Senator Cummings believes that this Government operates like how he use to run the Water Authority.

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: I could never believe that Mr. Speaker, because the Government would be successful if it did. I would never believe that.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: You ran an illegal operation at the Water Authority, you were Judge and Jury. [Interjection]

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Just a minute Honourable Member. Let me say to Honourable Senator Cummings, you cannot just jump up and talk, you cannot just jump up and talk, you understand; there is a rule. [Interjection]

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Illegal thing?

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, I said that and I can establish it. The illegal activity Mr. Speaker is this. Mr. Speaker, he ...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Two people on the floor.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, what he use to do, he would cut off people water ... say they have an illegal connection. He would determine the illegality of the connection and he would fine them. It is only the court could fine them. He is not a magistrate. I have argued that with him when he was there and I am Prime Minister. I told him that it was illegal. I have gone through that here already; perfectly illegal.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Continue your debate. [Interjection]

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Thank you Mr. Speaker. No. But I am telling you.

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: On a point of order. State your point of order.

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: The Honourable Prime Minister is lying on me; misrepresenting my position.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: You cannot use ...

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: Mr. Speaker...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: You cannot use ...

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister is speaking untruth about me.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: I am speaking. Okay. You cannot use the word lying.

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: I corrected it Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: Let me explain the untruth. Mr. Speaker as the Honourable Prime Minister knows, the Act which control the operation of the CWSA gives the Manager certain authority. In the process, Mr. Speaker, that authority is exercised by many officers, junior to the CEO. Moreover, Mr. Speaker matters of the kind described by the Prime Minister are the... [Interjection]

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Hold on I am just trying to get to [inaudible] I am just trying to [inaudible].

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: ... matters described by the Prime Minister are normally under the control of the Board of Directors and require their approval so that any act in that area carried out by the Water Authority is done not by the CEO but by and with the approval of the Board of the Department; therefore ...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: That is your point. Come to your point man.

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: ... it is unjust, untrue and deliberately misleading for the Honourable Prime Minister to say that I acted outside of the law.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: That is the point of order

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Could we ...

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker. I do not want to prolong this...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Yes. Let us not prolong this.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: But there was a judgement by the Hearing Officer under the Protection of Employment Act, which Mathew Thomas who was then the gentleman ...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: The Hearing Officer.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: ... who was the Hearing Officer said that he disrespects all the Labour Laws.

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: So what that has to do with cutting off water?

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: I am just talking here about ... Mr. speaker I had to call him to my office and tell him this is a labour government. [interjection] We cannot have him behaving like this. You see Mr. Speaker, I usually...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Let us continue the debate on the Bill.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Yes Mr. Speaker. [Interjection]

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Senator, please! Please! Why did you stand? Why you want to stand?

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: Mr. Speaker, I stood on a point of order and I clarified it and I did not hear you respond.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: What response you want me to give?

HONOURABLE DANIEL CUMMINGS: I said Mr. Speaker that the Honourable Prime Minister ...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: I will not accept it as a point of order. You made some statements I have not ruled on anything. I have nothing to rule on.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER I ask that the debate continue on the Banana.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition has finally gotten himself on the road to Damascus and has had a Pauline conversion in relation to the Inputs Warehouse.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: What you are talking about?

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: I am saying that because Mr. Speaker he led a demonstration against the fact that the Government had taken a decision to have the Input Warehouse Company be the sole importer of sugar, so that we could cross subsidize, Mr. Speaker, the profits we made from sugar we could subsidize the farmer with their inputs and their fertilizer. In fact ... [interjection] ... Yes! Because you said the Produce and Commodities Bill was a Communist piece of legislation and did not allow, and did not allow Mr. Speaker, he said the Private Sector to import the sugar. But what he wanted is one of his financiers...

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: You worry with that stupidity.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Oh! Oh! You call it stupidity. One of the importers who will go down to Guyana...

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Come with something new this year.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Come with something new, it burning.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Come on. Come on.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker and what would happened in those circumstances one importer would have gotten [interjection] one importer would have gotten the monopoly from the Guyana Sugar Producers in order to import the sugar and they would have made the profits. You See ...

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: Now get back to bananas. [Laughter] Get back to bananas.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: This relates to banana Mr. Speaker, fertilizer.

HONOURABLE ST CLAIR LEACOCK: No! No!

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Fertilizer. [Interjection] Mr. Speaker, I am really a little surprised to hear that Senator Leacock does not understand the provision under Clause 8: concerning '*Entry to Lands*'. This is a provision which exist for several entities. It exist for VINLEC a company with which he worked and supported the entry unto lands; obviously you cannot go about when people have issues dealing with the bananas, you are not going to have three months notice, by the time you give them the notice, *Leaf Spot* done mash up the whole place. I mean, this is the... Mr. Speaker, all what happens, it provides the authority, which is completely constitutional for an authorized person to go on to the land to see if there is anything untoward which is affecting the public good. It is not an unlawful entry. And there are several pieces of legislation with this

Now, I see, banana industry fund, he says, "It is only one set of people who know how to spend money". Mr. Speaker, the Constitution of this country, addresses certain matters as to finance, and I think the Honourable Senator Leacock has a problem with understanding this, because in the election campaign though it did not

appear in the Manifesto, he wanted everybody to have \$75,000 Capital Card, every Public Servant. The Leader of the Opposition I remembered that well, he twisted his face, he hid his face, he was in pain and anguish; that was the last time he had ever made that proposal; and now you are a champion for... you want at least every representative must have \$1 million to spend... I know that you had said that you wanted to be a millionaire...

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: If I did not know you, I would have swear that you smoked tonight...

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: ...by the time you were 30. I cannot understand why, you should wish that at age 56, to want to get \$1 million when you come into politics, for the Government to just hand \$1 million for you to spend in your constituency. No, man, you have to work for this thing, because there has to be proper accountability. You see, Mr. Speaker,

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: I just let that pass in the cut and thrust of politics. I am not getting up on a point of order.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: ...regulations, Mr. Speaker have to be made and the authority to make it is the Minister of Finance, that is all it says, and there are several pieces of legislation where this is the case. The Honourable Senator Cummings says, "I want to give you an idea". and I was really waiting with bated breathe, I thought, you know, I wanted to see this idea coming, but I did not realize that he had entered somewhere, metaphorically as a burglar and took an idea, burglarize an idea which is about 40 years old, which has been repeated by everybody that you must have, by a number of people, that you should have one agricultural body. That is not a new or earth shaking idea. I mean people write about that. In fact, if you go down in an article which I wrote in the newspaper under the name, 'Socrates', when I was 18 years old, I mentioned that. I mentioned that, when I was 18 years old, the problem is this, it is a very difficult thing to put all of it together, very difficult. He says, I do not know where the Honourable Senator Cummings lives, may be he travels too frequently outside of the country, he says, "Where is WIBDECO in marketing other produce and the development with other produce". WIBDECO, we announced it here in the Parliament, WIBDECO is a partner with National Properties on the Lauders Vacuum Packing Plant. They are putting a large amount of money...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Prime Minister you have ten minutes to conclude your debate.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: I am obliged, Mr. Speaker. I tell you, the Arrowroot Industry we are trying to see how we can hold it together, there are real challenges with it. Mr. Speaker, and Senator Cummings with this damning attitude. This thing was conjured up overnight. He has not heard on radio where there have been consultations. In fact, WINFA has been saying, "Prime Minister you say that government is not a continuing university seminal; we have been having so much consultation on this Bill". But they are so isolated and disconnected from the real world with the farmers, they do not even know that this Bill has been in the works and has gone through several versions and WINFA has been pushing to get it here.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we will put it to the Select Committee. We will put it to the Select committee. And we would want to see whether the Opposition would break their pledge in this New Year to their activist, a handful of them which have imprisoned them; to see whether they will come to the Select Committee. I want you to come. I want to see you there. I know that Senator Leacock came to the Finance Committee meeting, none other came, and they almost expelled him from the Party. [Laughter] He broke ranks. How could he go and sit down with them in the Cabinet Room to discuss this matter?

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Point of Order, I thought I had permission from the Honourable Leader to so do. Stop creating mischief.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: That is not what you told me.

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: I had no discussions with you.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: That is not what you told me.

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: I had absolutely no discussions with you.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: No, you know you spoke to me about it. You said, "Prime Minister I am an independent man". [Laughter] Mr. Speaker, so I really want to see...

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Mr. Speaker, it is clearly time for dinner. I am ready.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: It almost ready.

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Yes, time for dinner. When the Prime Minister behaves like that, it is when the worms are acting up.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, I want to see whether they will come. In summary, Mr. Speaker, this is a very straightforward Bill, which has streamlined the organisation. I will just say this for these times. I will just say this, Mr. Speaker. Currently, there are 49 persons employed in the Banana Growers Association; 17 in administration and finance, 13 in operation and extension, 18 in Leaf Spot control and there is one pilot.

What is being suggested and one of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, in the transition, you noticed we have said here, in clause 1: 2, this Act comes into operation on a date to be proclaimed by the Governor General by Proclamation in the Gazette, because there are some administrative things to put in place.

We are looking at 31 staff members from the operations, extension and Leaf Spot would be transferred to the Banana Division in the Ministry of Agriculture. 3 members of staff from the administration would also join the Banana Division as support staff; WINFA Fair Trade will take on 5 persons, the pilot will come over with the transitions, and there are 9 members of staff who have not yet been placed in particular positions. But we will seek to have them place.

We are having... this matter has been clearly thought out and Mr. Speaker, we have a particular interest in seeing an organisation which is leaner, which would be of a better benefit to the farmers. At the moment, Mr. Speaker, SVG Producers are making a lot of money in the Caribbean, the traffickers are also making. What is the issue therefore is the \$4? Because you have to spray, the Government has to get money to spray. When you go through an entity like WINFA and they work out their arrangements with WIBDECO, they have an interest in deducting, so that people can have something for spraying and such agronomic practices; but if the SVG Producers or anybody else, just take the bananas and sell, they do not pay anything at all. So you put on a license fee that is what this is about. I am sure that this year they probably come to us and say look this is a difficult year, you have it at \$4, why you do not put it at \$2, if they say that, we look at the situation, the Minister of Finance has the authority, to reduce it, it gives the power. And that is how these things are done practically in the way in which we reduce the taxes for the tourism people, in this period. I am sure, that the Senator having listened to me, Senator Leacock, he must be saying, I should not have followed my leader blindly. I should have read this Bill carefully. I should not have embraced an old concept of isomorphic approach.

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: You love it.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: I do not love it. I do not love it at all, because it does not add any value, I am laughing at it. I do not love it. Mr. Speaker, I do not share the view of Senator Leacock that there is no future in agriculture until all the Ministers in the region put their budgets together. I also do not share the view that we have a comparative advantage in bananas. We are addressing the value added issues and when we try...

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Mr. Speaker?

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Member? Yes.

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: When I spoke with respect to the comparative advantage, I said, I qualified it against certain locations clearly.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: I did not hear the point on which you are speaking.

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Hello?

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: I did not hear the point on which you are speaking.

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Because I made, it was obvious, I said we could not compete for example, with dollar bananas, people with greater mechanizations...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: I do not know whether you are moving on a Point of Order, or...

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Oh, he is misrepresenting me, Mr. Speaker, I cannot get the thing... He is misrepresenting me, Mr. Speaker, deliberately, Mr. Speaker, because we are getting up to the dinner break but we can excuse him.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker...

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Mr. Prime Minister very seriously I am a professional person and would not want it to be understood that I do not understand what is comparative advantage and competitive advantage and I really do not want you putting me on record as so stated. And with respect to my position on agriculture having a future, I also made it in the context... and it is a very serious point. We have to plan regional agriculture...

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: You are making a speech now on another Point of Order?

HONOURABLE ST. CLAIR LEACOCK: Yes, I am making a speech; it is necessary for me so to do. I want to make that very clear, so do not go out there and put my name as we say 'nigger mouth' in a negative way.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, I know he could not seriously mean what he had said, but he has only put the caveat. Now he thought he said it, but he did not say it. He said emphatically, "*We have a competitive advantage in bananas*". I have no doubt that he had an idea in his head to say it. It is just Mr. Speaker, like, he said, "*We cannot build this economy on monopoly market arrangement*". I did not think he meant monopoly. I thought that he meant Mr. Speaker, under the protective market arrangement. And when I heard him said that, I realized that he was finally coming around to accept the thesis of our quest to build a modern competitive post colonial economy, which is at once local, national, regional and global. And it is in that context that we are fashioning this new Banana Industry, this arrangement.

And Mr. Speaker, I have asked as Leader of the House, I have discussed it with the Honourable Minister of Agriculture and he has carriage of the Bill, and he is the one who would have to put the issue in respect of the Select Committee. But if he accepts us Mr. Speaker, I have some names and I am hoping that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition comes to the Select Committee. I am obliged.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

HONOURABLE MONTGOMERY DANIEL: Mr. Speaker, if the Honourable Leader of the Opposition so requested that we take the Bill to a Select Committee, I will so oblige, Mr. Speaker.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Prime Minister.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, the Members of the Select Committee, the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable Minister of Telecommunications and Industry, the Honourable Minister of Rural Transformation, the Honourable Minister of Education...

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: I believe maybe you are moving too fast for the Clerk.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: I am sorry. I am just wielding out the banana crowd. The Honourable Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable Minister of Telecommunications and Industry, the Honourable Minister of Rural Transformation, the Honourable Minister of Education, the Honourable Conrad Sayers, who has expertise, the Honourable Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, the Honourable Senator Saboto Caesar, and yours truly, Mr. Speaker, and of course the Attorney General.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HONOURABLE ARNHIM EUSTACE: Honourable Senator Leacock and myself, Leader of the Opposition.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Okay, that is it.

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: You alone might come you know.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Resolutions.

RESOLUTIONS

THE NATIONAL INSURANCE BENEFITS (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2008

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, may I just say this before I move. Mr. Speaker, really would like to get the reform process going, and I am hoping that we can move expeditiously with the Select Committee, so that we do not procrastinate and so on. I hope within two weeks we can get this thing done and we can be back in the House for the 26th February.

Mr. Speaker, these are the National Insurance Benefits (Amendment) Regulations 2008.

WHEREAS, the National Insurance Act Cap. 229 of the Laws of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (Revised Edition) 1990 under section 28 provides for regulations regarding rates of benefits;

AND WHEREAS, such regulations shall provide for the rates or amounts of benefits and the variation thereof, the conditions subject to which these benefits may be granted and the date from which the benefits are provided;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that this Honourable House pass the **National Insurance (Benefits) (Amendment) Regulations 2008** by resolution of the House of Assembly pursuant to section 48 of the said Act.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: Yes I do not think we have to debate it.

DR THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, this is by a negative resolution. This is the benefits recently and so we do not have to debate it. It is an up and down vote.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: We do not have to debate it. But I did not get a second anyway.

HONOURABLE SIR LOUIS STRAKER: I second the Motion.

HONOURABLE MR. SPEAKER: All right. As I said this resolution does not have to be debated. And therefore I will just read the operative part of it.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that this Honourable House pass the **National Insurance (Benefits) (Amendment) Regulations 2008** by resolution of the House of Assembly pursuant to section 48 of the said Act.

**Question put and agreed to
Resolution passed**

ADJOURNMENT

DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH GONSALVES: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, the date which we are suggesting is Thursday February 26th at 10 a.m.

Accordingly I beg to move that this Honourable House do stand adjourn until February 26th, 2009.

HONOURABLE SIR LOUIS STRAKER: I second the motion.

**Question put and agreed to.
House adjourned at 8:00 p.m. until Thursday 26th February, 2009 at 10:00 a.m.**